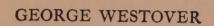




Francis W. Irwin 1/86 Kane so 15 Weekn





BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

PLAIN SONG, 1914-1916 A VOICE FROM THE DARK REDCLIFF THE RED REDMAYNES A SHADOW PASSES STORM IN A TEACUP THE BANKS OF COLNE BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED CHEAT-THE-BOYS. A story of the Devonshire Orchards CHERRY-STONES CHILDREN OF MEN CHRONICLES OF SAINT TID EUDOCIA. A comedy royal EVANDER GREEN ALLEYS. A comedy THE GREY ROOM THE HUMAN BOY AND THE WAR A HUMAN BOY'S DIARY THE LAVENDER DRAGON UP HILL AND DOWN DALE MISER'S MONEY ORPHAN DINAH PAN AND THE TWINS THREE BROTHERS THE TREASURES OF TYPHON

GEORGE WESTOVER

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Rew york
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1926

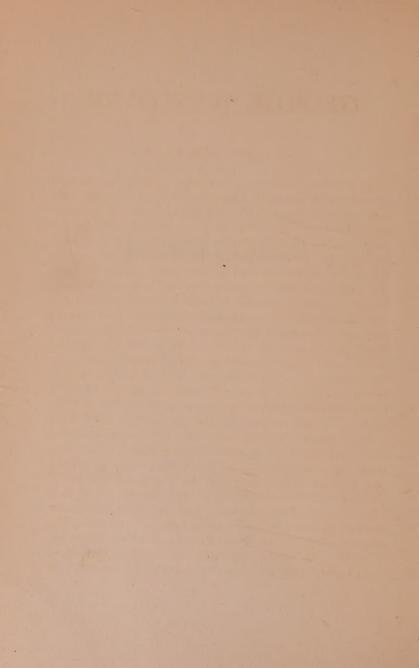
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Set up and electrotyped. Published February, 1926.



GEORGE WESTOVER



GEORGE WESTOVER

CHAPTER I

About four o'clock on an autumn afternoon, the rain ceased and a watery sunlight broke over the little seaside town of Dawmouth. At this point upon its progress, the Great Western Railway proceeds beside the coast, winds under red sandstone cliffs, and presently plunges into a tunnel at the end of the marine parade. Upon one side of the iron road lie the beaches; upon the other extends a promenade, flanked by lodging-houses, public baths and private dwellings. Through the valley behind them open public gardens, with lawns, trees and clumps of sea-loving shrubs; while the Daw, from her fountain in Haldon Hills, passes through the midst, descends over artificial falls and so sweeps under the railway bridge into the sea. On either side of this public space rise shops and houses, supported by a church on the western border and a chapel upon the east. The old town and the old church lie inland.

Dawmouth changes but little, and the township presented on this autumn evening more than fifty years ago, an aspect much the same as to-day. Now new and better buildings face the parade; old thatched dwellings have vanished, and larger houses taken their place; while other changes and alterations might be marked by one who had watched the growth of half-acentury; but in substance there was little difference. Then the old bathing machines were bulky and bulged with hoods over the steps, to conceal the bathers; the

old broad-gauge railway engines, which thundered along the front, were also bulky; and the figures of the women taking the air upon the promenade, displayed in their turn a bulky and rounded architecture caged within their crinolines. Suddenly thrust amid these vanished conditions, the circumstance most likely to have struck an observer from the present, must have appeared in the women's heads. To-day hats are large and visible hair scanty; in the year 1871 hats were mere buttons, or pill-boxes, while hair, augmented with massive chignons, and sometimes supported by ringlets, "made" a face, as the saving was. Men, too, tended to be more voluminous in those spacious Victorian times. Their trousers were larger—a reaction from the skimpy and tight-fitting nether clothes of the former generation—their coats were looser, their collars higher, their neckties more elaborate and their hats higher in the crown, wider in the brim. They, too, revelled in hair, and grew as much as nature permitted. Whiskers were held an adornment, and a flowing beard no eccentricity in a young man. The hair of the head was worn longer.

Among those now strolling upon the promenade, or standing in little friendly clusters, a man and a woman passed backward and forward unacknowledged by any about them. The man was upright and stood little short of six feet. He walked with a vigorous and springing stride, carried his head well up and eyed his fellow-creatures with amiable interest as he passed and repassed them. He wore a black frock-coat buttoned up, a tall hat, a black stock, old-fashioned for that date, and dark grey trousers a little short. They revealed elastic-sided boots, which appeared to impart a spring to the wearer. He carried an umbrella over his shoulder, but never put it to the ground. His face was largely concealed in a full beard and whiskers, while

from underneath his hat, curly locks descended. His countenance was clean cut and still strongly chiselled in all its visible lines; his eyes were blue and benignant. They lacked not for humour and showed no signs of dimness. Despite his snow-white hair, the vitality which characterised Sir George Westover suggested a man of sixty at the utmost; but he was seventy-six.

Beside him walked his eldest daughter. Gertrude Westover had reached the age of thirty-six and regarded herself as middle-aged. Indeed none thought of her as anything else. She had brown hair, a thoughtful, not undistinguished face and a full matronly figure; but lacked any good looks. She wore a skirt with many flounces over a crinoline of no surpassing abundance, and a little jacket of dark cloth trimmed with dark blue bows. Her hat was decorated with a dark blue feather, and she wore her veil down.

"Not quite so fast, Papa," she said.

The old man moderated his pace and shortened his stride.

"A thousand apologies, my love. I forget all that you have been doing lately. A very arduous business and not without an aspect of melancholy. Yes, yes—however, the past is past. Here a new life under new conditions awaits us; and if we are somewhat restricted in our outlook, the future limitations are welcome, seeing that they bring with them peace of mind."

"Yes, indeed, Papa."

"I have been regarding the promenaders covertly," said Gertrude's father. "They appear of a pleasant and agreeable class—possibly much as we are—impoverished gentle people, who find Dawmouth, with its modest society and small demands, a place where they may live in a seemly manner as becomes them, yet without expense."

"I dare say they do. It is a 'resort' I'm afraid."

"And what do you understand by a 'resort,' my love?"

"A holiday place, where people come for change of air and sea-bathing and boating in the summer months. But, no doubt, for more than half the year it will be peaceful enough."

"No doubt; and the visitors may bring a little gaiety. Let us return now. You must rest for the remainder of the day and I will lend a hand with the

unpacking."

They passed off the parade and, close beside it, Sir George pointed to a thatched dwelling nestling back from the roadway. A garden spread in front; there was a brass plate on the gate, and a red lamp over it.

"A physician, Gertrude," he said.

They passed some shops, and the old man was

amused at the names over them.

"'Tripe,' 'Hannaford,' 'Tozer,' 'Climo'—thus we see that we are in a new world," he declared. "Our very language comes differently off their Devonian tongues."

"It does indeed. I can't understand the new cook

vet."

"The dialect of Devon has a most noble ancestry, however, and we must pay it all the respect it demands. Here, in the West Country, survives the speech that Shakespeare puts into the mouths of his clowns. The broad 'a' and the harsh 's' were spoken in Elizabeth's ear when Drake and Raleigh came to court."

"You'll be speaking Devonshire soon, Papa, as easily as you speak Persian and Greek and everything

else."

He laughed, a deep-chested, vigorous laugh. His voice, though it ran away into the shrill of age if he was excited, still reverberated with good chest notes when he spoke slowly and weighed his words.

They ascended through the town, turned to the right and entered a region of private residences scattered upwards behind the valley and tending outward to the country beyond them. The villas stood, each surrounded by an acre or two of garden. In ten minutes they had reached an open and newly-painted gate flung back upon its hinges. A drive of thirty yards extended to the entrance of the house within. Small fir trees and a bank covered with periwinkles and ferns rose upon either side, and the hall-door of the house opened under a portico supported on two

pillars.

"Belmont Lodge" comprised four dwelling rooms, ten or a dozen bedrooms, and the usual offices. The entrance faced east and the main apartments gave due south upon a lawn, that was surrounded with trees and sloped sea-ward. But it stood well back from the cliffs and the Channel might only be seen from the upper windows. Along the front there opened two large bays with a French window between them. One bay lighted the dining-room; the other and the French window belonged to the drawing-room; and beyond it there rose a conservatory. Ugly mural decoration marked the summit of the bay-windows, and in the angles of the roof, above the upper storey, were hung floral wreaths fashioned of cement and painted white with the rest of the house. To the rear lay a large, walled kitchen-garden with a vinery, orchard house, hothouse and potting-shed. On the right of the main entrance ran a wall with a wide, double door which led to a two-stall stable, a yard and a coachhouse.

Sir George Westover surveyed his new home, as he ascended the little drive, and sighed.

"A box, my Gerty—a box! But given peace of mind, what matters? Many a better man than I has

lived in a box, and only left it for his heavenly mansion."

"Peace is everything, Papa. It's tiny after Bar-

good Hall; but if it proves within our means . . ."
"We shall save, my love. We shall save money here. Already I see a nucleus. The initial expenses have been considerable; but without a carriage and horses, and with five domestics instead of a dozen, the result must be swiftly apparent."

"I hope so, indeed, Papa."

"And still we have our incomparable 'Johnny'."

"Yes; we have Johnny."

"Now a cup of tea and then to work," he said.

They picked their way among the crates and litter at the entrance, turned into the dining-room and found a corner of the big mahogany table cleared and tea

spread upon it.

A woman greeted them; Gertrude's youngest sister. Cherry Westover had a pensive, pretty, unintelligent face; her hair was flaxen and her eyes were pale grey. She was of a retiring and very affectionate disposition. She jumped up, kissed her father and hoped that he had enjoyed his walk. Gertrude went to put off her jacket and hat and change her boots; while Sir George drank tea and cut himself a piece of cake.

He chattered of their constitutional and soon left

her for the garden.

Then Gertrude returned. Both sisters were weary after a strenuous day. Of late they had been called to face anxiety and difficulty, which left them overwearied in mind and body, while upon their father these mischances had made but little mark. They drank several cups of tea and spoke one or two kind words to each other. Then an old woman entered.

"Johnny" was dressed in black, with a small cap on her grey hair—a family servant of ancient standing. She was neat and trim, slight and still very upright. Her fortunes had been thrown into those of the Westover family for forty years. She was still good-looking, but her face, while pleasant, lacked not for firmness. Yet there was something wilful and feminine about Miss Johnston. She had distracted many men in her youth but remained a spinster.

"I'll ask Sir George to take his dinner in the servants' hall to-night, Miss Gertrude," she said. "Things are upsy down; but you'll be comfortable

there."

"Anywhere, Johnny, anywhere."

"Mischief knows where his evening clothes are got to," continued the old woman. "I'm afraid he'll have to go without 'em one more evening. But he do hate it."

"Papa won't mind. Has his flute turned up?"

Johnny frowned.

"No," she said. "God He knows what's come to the flute. He packed it himself. I always wanted him to put it in the valise; but no, it went in somewhere else."

Sir George returned a few moments later. He carried two little bunches of grapes for Gertrude and

Cherry.

"The vinery will need some consideration. There are problems there," he said. "Some rubbishy Black Alicantes must go, and a Grizzly Frontignan. Such things are behind the times. There is one respectable Muscat of Alexandria from which I have brought these little bunches."

"We can't find the flute, Sir George," said Johnny

with anxiety in her eyes.

"I have found it," he answered. "I packed it, Johnny, and I unpacked it before we went for our exercise."

"That's one trouble less then," said the old woman and left them.

Sir George now turned his attention to a stack of pictures which filled a corner; but Gertrude prayed him to desist.

"Oh, Papa, do leave those till to-morrow, or even later. We shan't be able to touch them yet. You're doing too much—you'll strain yourself—indeed you will."

"Doing too much, my Gerty? 'Strain myself'! I'm not made of straw I assure you. To hang them will need assistance from one of the operatives, no doubt; but we can run over them here and gradually distribute them in the rooms they will occupy."

Sir George began examining his works of art. There were many old and artistically worthless family portraits and other pictures in water-colour, mostly intended to represent Indian scenes. They possessed not one feature to excuse them. The colour was brilliant; the shadows were of a trying blue; the elephants and figures appeared hopelessly out of drawing; the compositions had no extenuating feature. Sir George, in painting these singular works, had apparently striven to reconcile the conventions of Eastern and Western art, with results most melancholy to contemplate.

He turned them over one by one and lingered about them with affection. He held that these pictures kept India fresh and bright within his memory. The circumstances that attended each effort were within his

recollection—some sad, some cheerful.

Presently he lifted his head and asked a question.

"Has your harp travelled safely, Cherry?"

"I hope so, Papa. I believe it's in the scullery at present."

"Ring," directed Sir George. "That is no place for

a musical instrument, even under these distracting conditions,"

"I'll go myself," answered the young woman. "I can't ring for them. They're all done up, and there's the dinner."

From amid the Indian pictures, Sir George drew a distinguished water-colour and pushed it carelessly aside. It was an English scene—a very masterly work.

"We'll put the river in the drawing-room, please,

Papa," said Gertrude, rescuing this fine thing.

"The one in my earlier manner, love? Put it where you will; but it has little interest."

"Everybody adores it," declared Miss Westover.

The tradition concerning this picture declared that Sir George had painted it in his youth for his mother. This he most firmly believed himself, and after the lapse of half a century, none was in a position to contradict him. But he set no store upon it.

Wearying of the pictures, he left them and bustled elsewhere. The workmen were gone for the day. Johnny had seen to it that the beds were put up, and now her pleasant voice was heard directing a new

housemaid to make them.

Sir George looked into his own chamber for a moment, regarded the sea from the window thoughtfully, breathed in the air of evening and standing with his hands clasped behind him, shut his eyes and addressed his thoughts to his Maker. He often prayed in this way, for he was impulsive and emotional, and a sudden reflection would awaken his piety. He thanked God now for having brought him and his family in safety to their new home. Then he recollected the far more spacious and distinguished old one, from which financial difficulties had driven him, and stopped praying. He turned to a chest of drawers on which stood piled

a thousand little things. From among them he drew a leathern case, opened it and extracted a flute in two pieces. It was an instrument of ebony with silver keys. He fitted the two parts together, breathed into it and then going out on the landing began to play "Home Sweet Home" in quavering fashion. But the notes, increasing their volume, travelled to Gertrude. to Cherry and to Johnny; and each in her own way felt glad to hear them.

After dinner, Sir George and his daughters sat a little while in the servants' hall, and he picked up his neglected "Morning Post." He generally read until some item of intelligence awakened thought and memory. Then he cast the newspaper or journal aside

and talked, if anybody were by to listen.

Now, while Gertrude and Cherry began to nod and long for sleep, their father gazed with round, blue eyes upon the page, dropped the "Morning Post" and sighed.

"Horrible!" he said, "yet not astonishing. Already we begin to glean the dreadful fruits of the new, false science."

"What has happened, Papa?" asked his younger

daughter.

"A man has committed suicide, my love, by drowning himself. From Carlisle we are told that, in the waters of the River Eden, a young fellow has taken his life. And why? Because, learning from the atrocious conclusions of Mr. Darwin that men are descended out of apes, he has felt no desire to live longer. He has left a memorandum to that effect."

"What a dreadful thing!"

"A very dreadful thing. And worse remains behind. This horror will creep like poison into the hearts of many weak-kneed persons. It may do infinite harm and even demoralise the nation. The Church is thundering against it; but it behoves every Christian man and woman to lift a voice in protest."

"You don't think there is anything in it, Papa?"

asked Gertrude sleepily.

"I think there is a great deal in it," answered Sir George, growing warm with indignation. "I think there is the germ of godlessness in it, the seeds of atheism! If we turned to our Bibles oftener, my love, and realised that the answer to every problem lies there, then, Gertrude, we should not falter and fumble with truth as we are too prone to do in this dangerous and destructive age. For what does the Omnipotent say to Mr. Darwin? He tells us in His inspired Word, that He willed to make man in His own image. That is enough for us to know; and the futile, perverse and unclean imaginings of this abominable man should be burned by the public hangman."

Johnny came in.

"D'you think you could have prayers a bit before half after nine, Sir George?" she asked. "The two new maidens are both falling asleep."

"We will have prayers at once, Johnny," answered

the old man; "then the household may retire."

CHAPTER II

SIR GEORGE WESTOVER was five years older than the century. From Haileybury College as a lad he had passed to the Indian Civil Service and accomplished his life's work in the East, retiring and returning home at the age of sixty-one. He had attained to the dignity of the High Court of Madras, and on relinquishing his

judgeship received a knighthood.

The old civilian was three times married and twice a widower at thirty. He wedded at five-and-twenty and his first wife died of cholera within a month of reaching India: the second, whom he married three years later, perished in child-birth, her babe dying with her. During the ten years that followed, George Westover was faithful to a Eurasian mistress, by whom he had two children, a boy and a girl. The children he recognised, for from his youth he had been of a temperament largely influenced by religion; and while he felt under no necessity to outrage convention and personal instinct by marrying the lovely girl with whom he cohabited, the children of their union he loved and cherished, holding them near and dear to him. They bore his own name and he had sent them to England to be educated.

When their mother died, George Westover, now a man of forty, took long leave, returned to England for six months and married again. His parents were dead, but a brother in the army and a brother in the church still lived. Both were older than himself; while his only sister was a few years younger. She had married a Devonshire man and been long widowed.

For thirty years his wife sustained George Westover, and their wedded days, first in India and latterly at home, were clouded only by customary cares. He was generous and improvident. India and his large salary had not combined to teach him thrift. He loved giving, and when finally he retired on a judge's pension, he failed to realise the difference between his great former emoluments and his more modest permanent income at home. He had saved little, but doubted not that money would go as far in the old country as abroad; and it was only his wife's business instincts, patience and good sense that had enabled him to live within his means and educate his family. For Lady Westover was a practical and far-sighted woman. From the first, after her husband's retirement, she had exercised and inspired control and restraint. Indeed he designed a far more considerable establishment than she permitted, and while he, in his impetuous fashion, imagined a staff and luxuries on the Indian pattern, she had moderated his intentions, and their home in Gloucestershire was conducted from the first after a manner less princely than Sir George had designed. Wages were modest in the late "fifties" and house rent was lower than to-day; but even so, the retired judge contemplated a mode of life founded on extensive ideas which must have swiftly occasioned embarrassment.

Gertrude Westover bore six children, of whom four survived. First came her eldest daughter, named Gertrude after her mother; then Cherry, and two years later, Wingate. There followed twin boys, who died in infancy, and. after an interval of some years, another daughter, Mary.

Lady Westover died when her husband had reached the age of seventy, and from the date of her decease, Sir George began to find life puzzle him on the temporal plane. A man of devout principles and strong prejudice, he was scrupulous and punctilious. But he lacked not humour and his amazing virility preserved in him a love of life. He was especially happy with women: and they, knowing that he appreciated their company, gave him their friendship. He made no fond mistake in this matter, as often happens with such men. He did not court, or pander to those who were generations younger than himself, or mistake their courtesy for interest. But elderly women he much affected, and they found him so brisk, gallant and

entertaining that few guessed his years.

Sane and sagacious in most relations of life, where money was concerned, Sir George invariably miscalculated, and upon his wife's death, the life at Bargood Hall slowly grew untenable. Gertrude Westover, his eldest daughter, strove with the problems and struggled as she best might to evade the inevitable. She had devoted her life to Sir George, and he relied more and more upon her. Cherry shared her parent's foggy sense of matters practical; while Wingate, so named after his mother's family, after unprofitable years at Oxford, was now articled to Sir George's solicitor in London, and did not promise to strengthen either the credit or renown of the family. His father dearly loved the young man, suspected in him greater promise than as yet appeared, and believed that the future would reveal Wingate in hopeful colours. He saw himself reflected in his son, but modifying factors, alien from himself, he did not see.

There remained Mary—"Queenie" as she was always called. At nineteen she had married a soldier and was now in India with her husband and two infants. Sir George esteemed his son-in-law, Captain Charles Bertram. The young man had served as a cadet through the Mutiny, and was marked for high

place in time to come. At present he served as a Political Agent on the staff of Lord Lawrence.

With his natural children Sir George also kept in touch. They were now in middle life, the daughter married to a Eurasian merchant at Calcutta and settled in India, the son, James Westover, in practice as a physician near London. Occasionally he and his wife had visited at Bargood Hall, and his father was devoted to him.

Thus stood the situation when grave difficulties confronted Sir George. He went to London, conferred with Messrs. Adshead, his men of business, and returning home announced with resignation that the Gloucestershire estate must be relinquished, and life allowed to run into new and much restricted channels. His widowed sister, Lady Harriet Warner, dwelt in Devonshire, near Exeter; and that fact inspired the old civilian to make a new home in the West Country. Dawmouth was discovered, and the villa of "Belmont Lodge," though in Gertrude's private estimation still over-large, satisfied her father. Here were still the horticultural facilities he regarded as essential, and he held that a gentleman of small means might dwell at Belmont Lodge with that measure of dignity and selfrespect proper to his position. Hither they came—the judge still older in mind than body and, indeed, mentally youthful also in some directions. With his sister, near Exeter, the family stayed for two nights; and then, upon the arrival of the furniture, proceeded to Dawmouth

Sir George was a very early riser, and on the morning after his arrival, he walked out of doors before breakfast. Having rambled from end to end of his little domain, he accosted an elderly man, engaged in cutting a new flower-bed on the lawn before the house. William Fry had been taken over with Belmont Lodge,

and knew the garden—every root in it, as he declared. He displayed a bent back, a shaven upper lip and chin and a fringe of tawny, grizzled whiskers that met beneath his jowl. His eyes were small and shrewd, his mouth large and kindly, his garments dirt-coloured. "Good morning, Fry," said Sir George.

"Marnin', your honour," answered the gardener.

"Our alterations will put you to little trouble," declared his new master, "for I find everything much as I should wish. This bed you are cutting below the slope from the terrace, will add light and gaiety to the lawn. I propose some experiments next spring, for I suspect that many Indian plants—the banana, the castor oil, the Cape gooseberry and the like-will prosper here during the summer months, and may be plunged out in their pots with excellent effects."

Fry nodded doubtfully, but did not answer.

"I grow these things from seeds," explained Sir George, "and a measure of interesting pot gardening should be in my power here, aided by this genial air. The glass-houses are small, but we must cut our coat according to our cloth, William Fry."

"For sure, your honour."

"Facilities on a narrow scale are not denied me, Fry, and what with my children, my flute and my easelthese are riches enough."

Gertrude emerged from the French window at this moment and approached her father. Unconscious of

her, Sir George continued:

"Political economy, Fry, is a subject that ought to be taught in our schools, for only those who have some grasp of the larger problems can tackle successfully the lesser—those personal difficulties represented by domestic economy. I confess that I am no economist."

The gardener nodded.

"Us of the land have got to learn economy, your

honour. Thrift be needful, else we'd get in a mess."

"And that, my dear fellow, is exactly what I did," said the old man. "It is extraordinary how expenditure evades you and seems to proceed behind your back, as it were. You leave your accounts in a satisfactory position and go on with your life, believing all to be well, and then, suddenly, on surveying your pass-book without the least apprehension, you are overwhelmed to find the whole face of the situation changed. You are not in the least conscious of the reason; you recollect no undue outlay, no self-indulgence, no particular act of charity; and yet from the offensive page there stares the fact that you are, once more, living beyond your means."

"Nothing on God's earth easier, master," said Fry. "But most reprehensible," argued Sir George. "It saps self-respect and creates great mental tribulation, Fry. Thrift, however, shall be my motto here, and I

look to you, among the rest, to help me."

"So I will then; but I warn your honour that the last people pecked the eyes out of our kitchen-garden—took all and gave nought. It properly screams out for stable manure."

"Ex nihilo nihil fit, Fry. It shall not scream in vain," promised Sir George, his blue eyes twinkling. And then Gertrude spoke. She had made a detour to avoid the white morning dew heavy on the herbage.

"Breakfast, Papa," she said.

"Miss Westover will strengthen your hands among the culinary things, Fry," explained Sir George. "I confess vegetables are not a subject in which I take surpassing interest. To fruit, however, I attach great importance. We must discuss each tree. Some I suspect are past bearing and will only help our wood stack."

"There's good and bad among 'em," answered the gardener.

As they returned to the house, Gertrude remonstrated. She had occasion often to reprove her father's

needless frankness.

"There was no need to tell this unknown man of our altered fortunes, Papa. Such people don't respect confidence, and it is so unnecessary, so lacking in reticence and reserve. He won't understand in the least, but just tell everybody you have come down in the world, or some dreadful thing like that."

"Why hide facts, my love? I am always open as

the day."

"It isn't a question of hiding them; but there are times when frankness is not called for."

"There is no doubt that I lack reticence," confessed Sir George, "—a singular thing in a Westover. But

it was always so."

At breakfast, after prayers, Miss Westover poured out the tea and devoted her attention to her father's small requirements. His first meal was of the slightest—dry toast, a cup of weak tea and an orange. When oranges were not to be procured he ate a peach, a nectarine, or a pear. They debated the day's work, but Sir George turned presently to other questions. He was a man of intense sociability.

"I suspect our neighbours will preserve the usual decorum," he said. "I trust the Dawmouth families are not such as would call on new-comers without introductions. I hope not. Those who do so are generally not desirable. We know, of course, that Admiral Ryecroft and his circle will presently honour us with their attention. He himself writes to me this morning with offers of hospitality if they would add to our convenience. Indeed he wants us to lunch with him to-day; but I have already sent Fry's boy

with a note of thanks explaining that we are all right."

"Yes, indeed, Papa; we mustn't go. There is so

much to do," said Cherry.

"He will understand that. He is a man of resource, as all sailors are, and would delight to help us."

"Please, Papa, don't ask. I don't want anybody to

see the house until we are straight."

"Nor do I, Gertrude. Then your Aunt Harriet at Honiton—write to-day, by-the-bye, and thank her for her immense kindness to us—she has a friend in this place, who will call, and who doubtless has her own society—a maiden lady—I forget her name."

"Miss Protheroe," said Cherry.

"Exactly—Miss Protheroe. Then the vicar, the Rev. Rupert Gilbert—of the distinguished old Devonshire family. His ancestor, no doubt, was Sir Walter Raleigh's half-brother—the famous explorer. Mr. Gilbert will call in due course and enlarge our acquaintance. I shall take my constitutional after lunch to the parish church, where I trust we are going to worship. A view of the interior will quickly tell if the services are such as commend themselves to me. Nowadays, such is the lack of law and order in the Establishment, that one is called to be careful."

"St. Jude's on the Strand, is High I hear," said

Gertrude.

"Then so much the worse for St. Jude's on the

Strand," replied Sir George.

He left them at their breakfast and entered his study—the third dwelling room—an apartment on the right-hand side of the entrance, with a window that faced to the east. A large flat-topped desk stood in the midst and empty book-shelves were erected against the walls, but the room remained in complete disorder up to the present. There were crates of books, and observing

one box, which he had marked with a large cross, Sir George began to empty it. Presently he came upon what he specially sought—a series of Bibles in different languages. English and Persian, Sanskrit and Greek volumes, Sir George extracted and put the massive tomes aside. He was a great linguist and spent varying portions of his time in collating the Scriptures of the New Testament. Once entrenched behind his Bibles, none might approach him. The act was understood to create an impregnable position which, as he once confessed to his younger daughter, Cherry, he sometimes found "a very present help in time of trouble." Placing the big books together on an empty shelf, he abandoned the crate and hastened out to two working men who had just arrived. He gave them amiable "good morning" and led them to their tasks.

CHAPTER III

Gertrude and her father were walking to pay Sir George's old friend, Admiral Ryecroft, a return visit. Christmas now approached; the family had settled down and welcomed callers. Life proceeded normally among the new interests. The admiral and Miss Protheroe had warned them concerning certain persons who would inevitably call, but must not be encouraged; yet among these doubtful visitors, some delighted Sir George. Thus matters for argument and interest

opened between him and his daughters.

Admiral Ryecroft lived in a Georgian house which overlooked the main street of the old town. Here a bow-window bulged aloft and the massive countenance of the admiral might often be seen in his "look-out," watching the life of Dawmouth as it passed and repassed his eyrie. He was a short, squat man with a big head, protuberant brown eyes and a scalp very bald. But this he covered with a silk cap indoors and a top-hat when he went out. He was a bachelor, a great gossip, a noted tea-drinker at afternoon parties and very popular with the elder generation. He loved business, and in addition to being Vicar's Churchwarden, filled the position of Honorary Secretary to the social club of Dawmouth, which enjoyed a membership of fifty.

The admiral, smoking a pipe in his bow-window, saw his visitors approaching. Whereupon he descended and hastened to his reception-room on the ground

floor.

They fell into a cheerful chat and a second caller, Mrs. Gilbert, the vicar's wife, who came upon some parochial question, occupied herself for a time with Gertrude Westover, thus enabling the two old men to talk together. When the ladies were engaged, Admiral Ryecroft beckoned Sir George, and they stole away.

"Just a spot of my Hollands," murmured the sailor,

but his friend declined.

"No spirits for me—indeed nothing. A glass or two of white, or red, wine is all I take, except on rare

occasions," said Sir George.

His friend helped himself, and they conversed for ten minutes before returning to the ladies. They saw alike in most things and were sincere and very honest in their limitations.

"Have you heard that Gladstone has placed the effigy of a Catholic saint on the new coinage?" asked the old civilian. "It would seem as though that abominable man takes a pleasure in outraging the highest instincts of the nation."

"Not a doubt of it. There is a perversity and obstinacy about the wretch. But the country is, I fancy, growing weary of him and his specious promises."

"Never, in my judgment, was England faced with

more insidious perils," continued Sir George.

"Things are happening of which we know nothing," declared his friend. "Subtle concessions are being made to the clamour of demagogues; there is a loosening of discipline, an inclination to temporise in matters where there can only be one way of honour and rectitude."

"Honour and rectitude are only right for the Opposition; they always go by the board with the Government. You've noticed that, Westover?"

"The reason is plain," admitted Sir George. "Power

brings responsibility, and to administer is one thing; to criticise administration quite another and much easier thing."

The admiral nodded.

"A Cabinet Minister once said to me, when I was urging certain courses on the Admiralty, that I must remember the gulf between ideal legislation and practical politics."

"It is a gulf in which many men lose their souls,"

declared the elder.

They returned to the rector's wife and Gertrude, and Sir George and his daughter presently prepared to take their leave.

"We shall meet at the rectory dinner-party," said the sailor. "It's given in your honour, you know. Isn't it, Mrs. Gilbert?"

"Most certainly it is," she said.

"And you've yet to decide about joining the Club," added Admiral Ryecroft.

But this Sir George declined to do.

"No clubs for me, Ryecroft. Gertrude will tell you that my club is my home. My course of life has become simplicity itself. I take the 'Morning Post' into my stove-house at nine o'clock, potter with my plants and so forth, and then look after my correspondence and set my house in order till luncheon. After that meal we go on our constitutionals and visit our new friends. Then we drink tea—"

"And somebody is drinking tea with us this evening, Papa, so we must really hasten," interrupted Gertrude.

"The Club is better than your hothouse; to sit in it at this time of the year is very bad for you," declared the admiral. "Change your mind and let me propose you."

They took their leave, and as they returned Gertrude

lamented the forthcoming dinner-party.

"I hope not much of that sort of thing is done," she

said; "because they're so expensive."

"I gather that not much is done," her father answered. "We have now entered a society where means are moderate and social amenities take shape in the modest entertainment of tea-drinking in winter and garden-parties and croquet during the summer months. Nothing pleasanter in its humble way. The dinner-party, however, must always command pre-eminence, and while we cannot entertain as of old, moderate hospitality is not denied to us."

"We can't go to dinners if we don't give them."

"Obviously, my love. Fear nothing. The entertainment at the vicarage is exceptional. After all a meal matters nothing; it is the spirit of good-will and

the companionship that make the function."

At home Cherry was already entertaining visitors: a young clergyman, named Baker, and his mother. Cherry, who possessed a measure of her father's energy, had found herself happy in the new home and accepted invitations from certain younger people near her own age. It was on an occasion when she had accompanied half a dozen girls to collect ivy and holly for Christmas church decorations, that she had met Mr. Baker, the brother of one of her new friends. His cure was not in Dawmouth. He worked at London and had come down to spend ten days with his mother.

Adam Baker and his parent resembled each other: they were florid, inclined to be stout and of the most genial and expansive nature. Sir George liked his children to make their own friends, and he welcomed the visitors with his usual urbanity. A shadow once crossed his eyes, for the clergyman wore a little silver cross on his watch-chain, which the old man regretted; but the young fellow himself was courteous and polite,

his mother charming.

Indeed to the latter Sir George devoted most of his attention, and Mrs. Baker attracted him, for she was a handsome woman of the type he admired. Harmless pleasantries passed and Mrs. Baker, while she loved to talk, proved a good listener also. Her husband had been a soldier, leaving her at his decease in very modest circumstances.

Gertrude said little, but observed much, according to her custom. It was not difficult to see that Cherry and Mr. Baker enjoyed each other's society. They chattered, passed from moments of badinage to discourse on serious subjects, which made Cherry solemn, drew down the corners of her pretty mouth and lowered her head a little.

Adam Baker told them of his work in London and the sufferings of the poor; then, seeing that he saddened his younger listener, he struck a more cheerful note and related humorous stories of cockney wit that made them laugh.

They began to talk about the Tichbourne case, and Mr. Baker had a funny story on this absorbing sub-

ject also.

When they were gone, Sir George praised them and declared Mrs. Baker to be an attractive and sensible woman. He generally found something pleasant to say about most women, save the sexless ones. These, by instinct, he recognised afar off and avoided when possible. He never said anything unkind about them, but confessed that any indication of a moustache on a woman or a suspicion of masculine vocal cords chilled his very soul.

"An acquisition, my Cherry—charming people; but one regretted that trinket on Mr. Baker's chain. What

does it indicate?"

"It indicates that he's a Christian clergyman, Papa. I don't think it means more."

But her father shook his head.

"Let us carry the symbol of our faith inside our hearts, not outside our stomachs, my love," he said.

It was upon this evening that affairs between Johnny and the new servants reached a crisis. There had been signs all was not well, and Gertrude prayed that, until after Christmas at least, no rupture might occur; but now, suddenly, after lighting of the lamps, the thing happened. His elder daughter had left the room upon the departure of the Bakers, and ten minutes later, she returned, a little pale, but outwardly calm. The crash had come.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to visit the kitchen, Papa, and speak to Johnny and the cook," she said.

Miss Johnston was one of those formidable and loyal old family servants whom the men of a household applaud and regard as vital to their comfort; but the women suffer with less enthusiasm. "Where should we be without our Johnny?" Sir George would often ask; and "Where indeed?" Gertrude and Cherry would answer, but in a flat and empty voice. She had become a tradition. Her master would extol her, explaining that she belonged to the faithful old order, nearly vanished off the earth-a relic of the feudal system and an indication that it was far from being the failure modern minds imagined. In truth, however, Johnny had neither part nor lot in the feudal system. No more independent woman lived, and, in her opinion, such obligations as might exist between the family and herself were entirely on their side. Sir George she honestly adored and had always done so. For Gertrude and Cherry, whose nurse from infancy she had been. she entertained a tolerant regard; but she cared more for their brother and their married sister than for them.

Sir George entered the kitchen to find Johnny and

the cook engaged in bitter and furious speech. A house-maid was crying in a corner; a scullery-maid peeping fearfully from the entrance to the scene of her labours.

"Not another hour in the house will I stay!" cried Susan, the cook. She was a big woman of sturdy proportions and she towered above Johnny. To Sir George the situation presented no difficulties whatever. He could always manage women. He sat down by the

kitchen table, rapped it sharply and spoke.

"Sarah and Jane, leave us," he said. "Both go away; and dry your tears, Jane. There can be nothing for you to cry about. Now, Johnston, sit at this end of the table, please, and you, Susan, kindly take that chair. You will have heard, Susan, that I long filled the position of a judge in the High Court of Madras. Therefore, you can trust me to be impartial. Johnny, here, has been my valued friend for more than forty years. She came to me when she was younger than you are at present. And I hope you, also, will be my valued friend, for I think highly of your cooking, Susan. Now, let us hear first what you have to say."

The cloud had burst over a question of an Indian curry. On occasions of Indian curry—a dish of which Sir George was very fond—Johnny always insisted on preparing the meal herself. She maintained that nobody who had not been in India knew how to cook rice, and Sir George, up to the present, had supported her in this assertion. But Susan, having long and patiently observed the formula, now maintained that her skill in this delicate matter equalled Johnny's.

The old Indian composed their differences with the

greatest despatch.

"We should all give of our best to others," he said, "and I'm sure that Johnston did not grudge you her vast experience, Susan. Similarly you have given her a hint in the matter of that admirable mixture of

cabbage and potato you serve with the breakfast bacon. A very excellent combination, I am told. I decree as follows. On the next occasion of a curry, Susan will arrange it single-handed. I shall approach it without bias—judicially—impartially. If all be well with it, then we may assume that Susan has mastered the only proper manner to cook rice; if, however, the grains are not all separate, and the mass not as dry, mellow, and succulent as it should be, then Susan must be content to go to school to Johnny a little longer. But nothing of this kind is worthy of a second thought compared to the far greater obligation and duty of keeping the temper in bounds and going in charity with your neighbour. Now, women, shake hands, if you please; and if you are feeling your side, Johnny, I will get you a little dose."

Sir George was a great physician, and delighted to medicine his people. He had a large chest of physics and considered himself as a sound authority on all minor ailments. When the doctor was "in the house" as he expressed it, the old man would not let him depart without a chat; and he himself always visited any member of his establishment who was sick or suffering. He never passed a bottle of medicine without shaking it, removing the cork and tasting the contents on the point of his finger. He inclined himself to homeopathic methods, since over-dosing a native servant in

the far past.

"A pinch of bromide, Johnny," said Sir George. "I will prepare it immediately. Join me in my dress-

ing-room in five minutes."

After dinner that night Cherry read the newspaper aloud. It was a new habit, for of late her father had set up his easel in his stove-house and painted there during the morning, leaving the news until the end of the day. This plan suited the old man well, and en-

abled him to conserve his eyesight. He did not smoke, but sat quietly upright by the fire, while Cherry read, or played her harp, or Gertrude played the piano. Sometimes he would essay to accompany Cherry with his flute: but never Gertrude. Gertrude's music he took seriously. She had been well-trained and he considered her playing to be much above the common. Cherry and himself he regarded as amateurs, and they performed old-folk melodies and simple hymn tunes together. But Gertrude played Mozart and Beethoven. She could also manage a little Chopin, but had never persevered with that master, because her father won no pleasure from him. Mozart he specially enjoyed when life went smoothly. Before difficulties, or problems, he invariably inclined to the Fifth Sonata of Beethoven, which he regarded as the sublimest composition ever written for the pianoforte.

To-night Cherry read and reported that King Victor Emmanuel had opened in Person the Session of the

Italian Parliament.

Sir George rejoiced.

"Italia una! Italia una! Blessed thought," he said.

CHAPTER IV

GERTRUDE WESTOVER had never thought much on matrimony, and at her mother's death it seemed to her. educated as she had been in a vanished tradition, that her duty was to take her parent's place as much as might be, and henceforth dedicate herself to her father. Once only had she been asked in marriage by a man considerably her senior. He was attractive and kindly and much in love with her personality and good sense; but she had not felt any emotion other than respect and regard for him, and the matter never reached her father's ears. She regarded herself now as middle-aged, and while interested in life and of a nature not unsociable, concentrated upon Sir George and regarded him as the first object of existence. He often made her anxious, and there was much in his character that puzzled her. His astounding vitality she did not share; but her opinions took colour from his, though she was dimly conscious sometimes that he echoed the past, and that not a few who loved him, none the less mixed a little good-natured tolerance with their affection and regarded him as a survival. This she resented, and had gone so far as to quarrel with his sister, her Aunt Harriet, on the last occasion of their meeting, when Lady Warner declared her brother's opinions on certain subjects to be archaic. Sir George himself was present and laughed at the criticism; but Gertrude saw nothing to laugh at. She regarded her aunt as frivolous and thought her humour unbecoming to age.

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Of Cherry Westover it might be said that she drew men by her good looks and simple charm, and then chilled them by a vagueness of character and a lack of any certitude and conviction, that left them with a sense of admiration wasted on a shadow. She was warm-hearted, friendly to all, energetic and always willing to pleasure anybody; yet while she enjoyed something of her father's energy and zest of life, she had inherited none of his character, convictions, or intense power of feeling. She liked men and enjoyed their attention; but, while there had been several she would have wedded in the event of her father's approval, it did not lie in her nature to rise to any height of emotion. She was a little frightened of her father and often wondered at his strong interest in many subjects which for her awakened no interest whatever. She rather hoped to marry and enjoy a home of her own, for she loved children in a gentle and negative fashion; but sex had never disturbed her and was not likely to do so. Her father's delight in feminine society mildly amused her, but she did not understand it. To Cherry it seemed strange that he should often prefer the prattle of her sex to the discourse of his own. She had been brought up in an atmosphere of the past. when women were subordinate as a matter of course: and that attitude seemed right and reasonable to her, when the apparent disparity existing between the intelligence of men and women was considerable. She judged women by herself, and ebullitions of character. such as Gertrude and Johnny sometimes displayed, rendered the colourless young woman uneasy.

Her opinions, implicit rather than expressed, served to win her a sort of regard from Sir George, which he denied to the more sagacious and clear-minded Gertrude. At times he took Cherry into confidence and imparted little secrets denied to her sister; for character displayed by a woman always reacts on the men about her. Sir George was not frightened of his eldest daughter; but instinct and experience led him upon occasion to act without consulting her, when there arose a desire to accomplish feats upon which Gertrude would not smile. Sometimes the results had justified his diplomacy; sometimes the reverse proved to be the case. With men he feared nothing; with women it seemed to Cherry that he was not so absolutely brave. It appeared impossible that he could always agree with whatever a woman might say; but she guessed that he was too kind-hearted to differ from the stupid creatures, especially if they were handsome in his eyes.

The dinner-party at the vicarage passed off in a manner satisfactory to all, and elderly people, to the number of eight, who were present, declared themselves as charmed with the Westovers. Sir George seemed a link with the past. His fob and seals, the little frill on his dress-shirt, his collar-somewhat full and high and of an ancient cut—these things and his diction carried an aroma of late Georgian days, while his vivacity and humour belonged to the present. Returning home in a cab with his daughters, the old man praised their entertainment highly.

"But the cooking was not good, Papa," said Ger-

trude.

"Was it not, love? The port wine, however, struck me as excellent. It came, so Mr. Gilbert told me, from the cellar of the late bishop of the diocese. 'Henry of Exeter'—a great man on his political side. His opposition to the Reform Bill before the House of Lords I recollect as a magnificent performance. In matters of religion, however, he was inclined to a dangerous tolerance. But the port was superb: I drank two glasses. Such a generous and well-mannered wine awakens no afterthought."

Gertrude and Cherry chatted cheerily while their father sank into silence. Already he was secretly planning a return of hospitality. He loved a dinnerparty. He intended no confidences as yet and misdoubted his elder daughter; but an ingenuous question revealed the tenor of his thoughts.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that the plate should be rubbed up and taken from the plate-box, my Gerty."

"I'm sure it does, Papa," she answered, and Cherry laughed.

"We know now quite well what you are thinking

about, Papa," she said.

"Tchut! you're sly minxes!" he answered; "but take no alarm. I am only concerned with a remote event."

They found Johnny rubbing up the family plate a few days later, and Gertrude raised no question. Life proceeded and an early spring was promised. After Easter, Mr. Baker returned to spend a few days with his mother and, on learning the fact, Sir George extended an invitation to dine. For now the dinnerparty was an accepted fact. Mrs. Baker, whose friendship with the Westovers had ripened, had already been invited, and learning that her son would be at home, he too, was asked, with another woman to complete the party.

Gertrude had privately indicated to Sir George that

the clergyman was interested in her sister.

"I think it right that you should know, Papa, that Mr. Baker has been paying Cherry a certain amount of attention. He has written to her once or twice of late, and sent her books. There is, of course, no secret, and in these delicate matters you are the first to deprecate interference. But so it is."

He nodded his head.

"Be sure that if anything definite arises I shall be

the first to hear of it. I know nothing for or against the young man. He would probably approach me for permission to pay his court, for he is a gentleman of course. He will not be the first who has nibbled at our Cherry, and the years slip by so swiftly that, without doubt, if she is to wed, the time approaches. Indeed one had thought it was past. Cherry must be thirty years of age."

"She's thirty-two."

"Dear me! Then it seems almost too late. I doubt the wisdom of these late marriages. I had personally come to the conclusion that she was not destined to take a husband."

"There may be nothing in it. She's very vague;

but then, she's always vague."

"I will devote a little veiled attention to the man, my love, when next we meet. Cherry is, of course, youthful for her age. She has a sweet mind, though a somewhat empty one. However, there are worse things than emptiness. The man should be older than his wife, but, as I recollect, he seemed young too."

"He told Cherry he was thirty-five."

"Did he? When men mention their ages, that indi-

cates purpose and seriousness."

And meanwhile Cherry had met Adam Baker on various occasions and found him agreeable and interesting. At a tea-party they had come together again, and the clergyman's animation and evident pleasure served mildly to thrill Cherry. She began to think that she was in love, and after an open and cheerful greeting, presently became uneasy and self-conscious.

Again they met, when Cherry was doing the morning's shopping for Gertrude, and he insisted on carrying her parcels and accompanying her home to the

gate of Belmont Lodge.

He invited her on this occasion to hear him preach.

"I take the evening service for Mr. Pease on Sun-

day," he said. "Do come, Miss Westover."

But Cherry shook her head. They had never discussed religion, and his suggestion rather alarmed her, for it meant far more than Adam Baker imagined.

"That's St. Jude's, Mr. Baker?"
"Yes—don't you go there?"

"Oh no. We go to the parish church. Papa, I'm afraid, would not at all like any of us to attend St. Jude's."

"Dear me," murmured the young man, blankly. "Is Sir George opposed to the tenets of the Anglicans?

The parish church is so very—"

"Papa was delighted to find Mr. Gilbert preached in a black gown. He loves that sort of thing. He has joined the opposition to a surpliced male choir, which a good many people want, you know. The vicar is quite open-minded about it. He is willing to leave it to the parishioners."

"And they will get it, of course. But I'm sorry-

I'm-I'm High Church, Miss Westover."

Cherry changed the subject and they parted in common perturbation. The incident bulked heavily in Miss Westover's mind, however, for she began to think a good deal of Adam Baker. They had corresponded and exchanged presents. She had sent him some primroses, and he had despatched to her a new novel by the Reverend Charles Kingsley. Mr. Baker, being the more ignorant, felt the more sanguine on considering what he had learned. He suspected that a man of such active mind, such judicial principles and such breadth of vision as Sir George appeared to be, would never regard as an obstacle to love a moderate difference of opinion on questions of religion. It could not be that any considerable gulf separated them, for he felt very certain that in spirit the old

judge and himself were one. Thus with the optimism of youth, he took hope; while Cherry, knowing her father better, was well aware that an insuperable barrier had arisen. She felt not deeply upon the subject herself, but had been taught to believe that ritualism was a dangerous offence. Sir George held it a grave peril and suspected all who practised and supported it to be of dark and devious opinions—subversive, directed against the Constitution—popish and, as such, abhorrent.

Cherry would much have liked to hear Mr. Baker preach, and she could not believe that any plot against the Constitution harboured in his broad bosom; but did she attend St. Jude's, she very well knew what pain and indignation such an act must awaken at home.

She did not consider the deed for a moment.

On returning home she found her father had his own troubles. A coldness clearly existed between Gertrude and Sir George, and luncheon proceeded in silence. Cherry knew what that meant, and her inclination, inspired by private reflections, was to side with her sister. Sometimes she supported the one on occasions of difference; sometimes the other; but as a rule it was Sir George who won her secret sympathy. Psychologically to-day, however, in the atmosphere created by her meeting with Mr. Baker, Cherry found herself on Gertrude's side; and when, as she knew he would her father, on his elder daughter's departure, sighed and indicated tribulation, she was not so quick as usual to lift his spirits.

"I have wounded Gertrude," he said. "I cannot, however, feel her attitude to be justified. The facts, Cherry, are these. They relate to our forth-coming dinner-party. To-day my wine merchants have responded to a recent order, and there have arrived certain cases of wine. Twelve dozen are all that I have

purchased; but one must have something in the nature of a cellar if one is to continue to observe the usages of civilisation at all, and a nucleus of this sort appears to me to be a minimum. I am called to pay something under fifty pounds for the consignment. I have now fortified my commissariat and can say that there is a good bottle of sherry or port, burgundy or champagne, for a friend should the need arise. I can give an occasional entertainment; I can repay hospitality in kind. Surely thus to guard ourselves in a vital particular was not an offence to manners or morals? And yet Gertrude has expressed herself quite warmly on the incident, and created one of those oppressive gaps in our trust and affection, that she so well knows how to do."

"Fifty pounds is a great deal of money, Papa," said the young woman, and Sir George perceived that her voice, too, was cold. He stroked his beard and his blue eyes clouded.

"Is it?" he asked. "Since when?"

"Since we left Bargood. Surely, Papa, you know that?"

He sighed.

"Tchut! You, too, without a sense of proportion! Shall it, then, be denied me to offer a glass of spark-

ling wine to a guest?"

"I'm not suggesting you drink it yourself, Papa," replied Cherry. "We well know how wonderfully abstemious you are; but you have often said that a dinner-party is nothing in itself, save an excuse for meeting other people in a spirit of affection and goodwill. The eating and drinking are the least important part."

"Would you have me offer water to those who gave

me wine, my love?"

"No, of course not, Papa. But you are not going

to open twelve dozen bottles for one dinner-party of twelve people, I suppose? No doubt Gertrude feels that such an amount all at once was needless."

"It is a subject upon which women are ignorant," he answered mildly. "Their judgment, therefore, may be regarded as without weight. One lays down wine, Cherry, with a view to its future improvement. Ten years hence, my love, we shall have a port and sherry of very distinguished character. One looks ahead in these cases. This, I have reason to believe, will not be our last dinner-party. I need not detain you further."

He left her, each impressed with the other's lack of understanding, and Sir George, feeling in tune for collation, proceeded to his study, sighed again and brought out the Greek, the Sanskrit and the English New Testaments. With papers and pencil he proceeded, and when Gertrude knocked, he hesitated a few moments before he bade her enter. Finding him entrenched, however, she left the room again immediately.

"Your pardon, Papa," she said. "I did not know."

Then she closed the door.

On the evening of that day Cherry was about to play

her harp, but Sir George directed otherwise.

"I am not in mood for your joyous music, my Cherry," he said. "If Gertrude will be good enough to play the adagio movement from the Fifth Sonata, I shall thank her."

"With pleasure, dear Papa," replied Gertrude; and presently set about it, while the old man sat stiff and upright, his hands joined on his lap.

An hour later he read prayers; then kissed each of

his daughters upon the forehead and retired.

CHAPTER V

THE virile and healthy are not prone to retrospection: they either live in the present, or look with confidence to the future. Those who turn much upon the past are most frequently persons of uncertain constitution, or such as are called to face clouded fortune and dis-

appointed hope.

Sir George Westover knew nothing of indifferent physical circumstances. He was endowed with exceptional health and a sanguine temperament that never failed him. To dwell over-much upon the past he regarded as weak-minded, and any shadow of morbidity was foreign to his outlook upon life. He delighted indeed to relate his experiences of law and politics in India and his relations with the Native Rulers, for some of whom he still entertained personal affection; but never did he express regret that his adult years were done and life at the ebb. Indeed he scarcely realised its ebbing. So full were his days, so sound and well-working his physical machine, that proleptic reflections seldom warned him. In a measure he had to thank his own sobriety and self-control for this fortunate condition. Of a continent and sparing habit, the restraints that climate put upon him during his official career were recognised and felt as no hardship. He had passed into old age almost unconscious as yet of its disabilities. His body continued unusually active, and his intellect, such as it was, remained clear. But while himself with scarcely a recollection of illness, Sir George had always delighted to dabble in physic

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for other people. He was immensely interested in medicine and always declared that, but for the wish of his father, he would have chosen the medical profession for his own. It did not surprise him when his eldest son elected to become a doctor. Indeed he was pleased that he should do so.

All those beneath the old Indian's roof were called, soon or late, to drink his prescriptions, which he delighted himself to compound from the contents of his medicine chest; and Johnny had ever proved an enthusiastic and trusting patient. Something like a sensation was therefore experienced when, on the morning of the dinner-party, she reported herself ill, but on

examination declined drugs.

Johnny's sudden and violent indisposition proved a very mysterious affair, and Sir George and Gertrude felt from the first that there was more in this collapse than the faithful woman would confess. Very peculiar features marked the mystery. She was an early riser and among morning duties jealously undertaken by her, the visit to the letter-box usually came first. Johnny gathered the letters and arranged them on the breakfast table. This she never failed to do.

"She done just as usual," explained Jane, the house-maid, "and then, without a word, she went back to her room and took off her clothes and got back in her bed. She rang, and when Sarah went up, she said she was powerful bad and meant to bide there till she was better. Sarah said Miss Johnston appeared like as if she'd been crying a lot. She's let down her breakfast,

however."

Gertrude acquainted her father with the facts and

he prepared to see Johnny at once.

"She will confide in me," he said. "I know her constitution thoroughly. Probably this is a nerve storm resulting from anxieties about the dinner-party."

His old friend saw him, but was reserved and had a strange tale to tell. In a quarter of an hour Sir George

returned to his daughters.

"Something of the most unusual character has happened to Johnny," he explained. "She opposes a barrier of silence to my questions. She refuses to let me see her tongue and declares herself to be suffering from mental shock alone. I feared she must have received a letter containing evil news; and yet whence could it come? She has no relations in the world and her trifling savings are in my own hands on her behalf. Thus she is one of those rare, isolated characters on whom personal bad news cannot impinge. Yet she has certainly been weeping and is inclined to begin again at any moment. Her intellect is clear and her relations with Susan are now of the best."

"But what does she say, Papa?" asked Cherry. "Didn't you ask her how she was feeling, and why?"

"Certainly I did. I insisted upon knowing also. She admits that she is feeling very miserable indeed, and that there are excellent reasons why she should so feel. She is not ill; indeed the unknown trouble has made her unusually hungry. She confessed it and marvelled at it. For the rest she has promised me to tell all there is to tell to-morrow. To-morrow the secret is to be divulged; to-day nothing will induce her to reveal it."

"Perhaps she wants the dinner-party to go off well and fears that it wouldn't if she told us what has happened to her," suggested Gertrude. "It would be like her to think of that."

"What is your theory, Papa?" asked Cherry.

"You have always got a theory."

"I am inclined to suspect that Johnny believes herself stricken with some malignant malady, my love," declared Sir George. "Devoutly I hope and believe that she is mistaken; but laywomen, even more than laymen, come to idiotic conclusions on subjects of health. She may have discovered, or experienced some physical symptom, and so have jumped to the conclusion that her hour has come. In that case, no doubt, she will be ready and willing to see the doctor to-morrow, but, as Gertrude suggests, will put it off until after our party, so that none of us shall be cast down."

Thus the matter was left, and two hours before the arrival of the company, Cherry reported that Miss Johnston had left her room and was helping the cook. All prospered well. Gertrude herself wrote the menus; Sir George decorated the table. He loved flowers and after the fashion of the day loaded the board with a superfluity of blossoms and trailed lengths of creeping things about among his plate. The centre-piece was an elaborate and massive bowl of pure silver heavily chiselled-a gift from Madras on the judge's retirement. Wax candles in old silver candlesticks illuminated the scene. A damask table-cloth shone lustrously beneath them, for Sir George was of the school that did not uncover the mahogany until the time came for dessert to be placed upon it. The heavy table silver exhibited a wyvern—the crest of the Westovers. The coat that went with it they did not display.

The guests were nine in number. There came the vicar, Mrs. Gilbert and a daughter; Admiral Ryecroft; Mrs. Baker, with Adam, her son, and Ann, her daughter; Dr. Selhurst, a physician, and Miss Protheroe, the friend of Sir George's sister. Miss Protheroe was vivacious and humorous, and she enjoyed a large experience of good society, for as the daughter of a vanished diplomat, she had lived at Vienna and at Rome. Her ideas were tolerant, and Sir George laughed at her stories, though he considered her a little too broad-minded for a woman. She told them

about a new game, called 'lawn-tennis,' of a most active character and prophesied that it would be found possible for women to play it.

"It sounds too violent for the sex," declared Mr. Gilbert; but Adam Baker, who had actually seen the

game, thought not.

"Two courts are marked out," he explained, "rather in the shape of an hour-glass, and there is a fairly high net raised between them. You have to hit the ball over the net and keep it in your opponent's court. It is pretty active—a sort of adaptation of real tennis, but not so strenuous."

"If anything like real tennis, then certainly quite out of the question for a woman," decided the admiral. Johnny appeared at dinner and waited as only she

Johnny appeared at dinner and waited as only she could wait; but she was pale and evidently enduring much tribulation still. She removed the cloth and placed the dessert upon a polished table at the appointed time, and she disappeared before the ladies withdrew.

The men then clustered about the head of the table, where Sir George sat, and Admiral Ryecroft, the doctor, the vicar and their host drank port; but Mr. Baker was a teetotaller.

"Not from conviction, but for example," he explained to Mr. Gilbert. "Where I work, one is thrown into very close contact with the stevedores—a thirsty class—and they are much more inclined to respect my views when they find I drink nothing myself."

The elder clergyman, however, was not impressed with such a policy. An old man of steadfast principles inherited from the past, he could not esteem an attitude

which he thought lacking in dignity.

"Thirst is a natural and healthy impulse, and personally I see no objection to stimulant," he said. "Why seek to separate the British working man from

his honest malt liquor? Why ignore those vast vested interests which malt liquor represents? Temperance by all means; but I would not emasculate Demos. If you abstain—however, I suspect we should not agree on this question, Mr. Baker."

The vicar, indeed, was unprepared to agree on any question with a ritualist. He had been astonished to find Adam at the dinner-party and wondered if Sir

George knew his opinions.

The curate from the East End, however, did not

permit the subject to drop.

"I think, sir, we should agree if you saw drunkenness at first hand as I so often have to do," he answered. "It has been well and wisely said that 'Sin is all that resists the evolution of morals and goodness all that tends to advance that evolution."

Mr. Gilbert stared.

"I question whether that was well or wisely said," he replied, fingering the stem of his wine glass. "The very word 'evolution' reeks with elements of danger to faith. 'Progress' if you like; but, in my humble opinion, the word 'evolution' at the present time should not be found on the lips of a minister of the Gospel—except to condemn it."

Mr. Baker cracked a walnut.

"Dear me!" he answered. "I do not find this aversion. What's in a name, sir? John Stuart Mill warns us—not the Church only, but all of us—to avoid the danger of 'reposing in the deep slumber of a decided opinion."

"Doubtless he would," replied the vicar. "Doubtless a man of his dangerous and insidious views would find the bulwarks of steadfast opinion exceedingly opposed to his atheistical and abominable heresies. But long may decided opinions confront and confound him, and all who think with him. Mr. Baker."

Mr. Gilbert turned to his host and the younger clergyman was glad that he did so. He spoke with Dr. Selhurst, who happened to be a sidesman at St. Jude's. Conversation became general, and Sir George found himself in good heart under the atmosphere engendered by his own hospitality—for he always loved better to give than take. He spoke of art, as he understood the term, of politics, of India and England's duty to the vast, incoherent population of those kingdoms.

Admiral Ryecroft had prophesied the Mutiny, and in this connection, Sir George, responsible during that terrible period for commissariat and other arrangements, touched lightly on his own achievements; but

praised the soldiers.

"My own son-in-law did vastly well," he told them. "His horse was shot under him, for his troops revolted on parade and opened fire upon their officers. He knew they were disaffected and begged his commanding officer to attempt no parade; but the colonel thought otherwise. He believed implicitly in the loyalty and devotion of his regiment—with disastrous results to himself, for he fell, pierced by a dozen balls. Bertram, my youngest daughter's husband, escaped on the horse of a subaltern, riding behind the owner."

The talk presently drifted to religion, and Mr. Baker, unabashed by recent rebukes, ventured to join in it. He was a good reader and believed that it behoved every clergyman to keep an open mind and study without prejudice the opinions of those who stood for other channels of thought and ethical progress than his own—a large-minded theory to be found not much

followed or practised at that time.

But Mr. Baker had a good memory, respected the force of apt quotation and, in argument, was prone to fall back upon the utterances of more eminent thinkers than himself. Unhappily his authorities were not such

as to commend themselves to any of his present hearers save Dr. Selhurst.

The subject of sin once more occupied Sir George and his guests, and the old civilian was prepared to take a somewhat more tolerant standpoint as to the infringements of moral law than that revealed by the vicar.

"A just man must have patience and not expect miracles," declared the judge. "Sin is not an unnatural condition. Given a fallen creature, then, having satisfied ourselves as to the nature of the pit into which his own folly and disobedience have cast him, we must proceed to drag the fellow out. But this operation is not one to be performed by a conjuror's sleight-of-hand. Thanks be to God alone, we have the means to perform the feat. Man is rendered capable of redemption by the sacrifice of Christ; but, given the means, we are confronted with the task of applying the means, and so far we have not solved that stupendous difficulty with completeness. But each of us can do his best to help the search."

Mr. Baker highly approved this statement.

"How true, Sir George; how very true indeed!" he exclaimed. "You remind me of a most beautiful and large-minded statement written by Mr. Morley. He says that 'a man will be already in no mean paradise if, at his sunset hour, good hope can fall upon him, like harmonies of music, that the happiness of every creature shall be increased and each good cause find worthy defenders, when the memory of his own poor name and personality have long been blotted out.' None of us can do much, but every one of us can do a little to advance the great cause of humanity."

The three, already in their sunset hour, considered this saying doubtfully; but upon the whole Sir George

and the old sailor approved it.

"As an administrator, Mr. Morley commands my respect," said Sir George. "His writings I do not know."

They were less satisfied with Mr. Baker's later statements, however; for at a further pass in the conversation, after the vicar had defined the true status and significance of the parishioner in a well-ordered cure, and indicated what lay men and women might and might not be permitted to take upon them, Adam, with ill-judged flippancy, said an unpardonable thing. He spoke on the spur of the moment and, too late, regretted.

"Not to mince words," he said, "we must confess—in strict confidence, of course—that single women are the backbone of the Church. We have only to ask ourselves where a parish would be without them to see

Low true this is."

Admiral Ryecroft stared; the vicar glared; Sir

George flinched.

There was a painful silence, each of the four men waiting for one of the others to speak. Dr. Selhurst was about to do so, when his host rose.

"I think," he said, "if all are ready, that we will join

the ladies."

In the drawing-room Miss Protheroe had declared her admiration for Gertrude's father, and Mrs. Gilbert, a silvery old woman, who had once been beautiful, affirmed her criticism.

"The gallantry of the man!" exclaimed Miss Protheroe. "He is such a courtier. He makes you forget he is—well, elderly, and that you are yourself. It is ridiculous to apply the word 'old' to him. His lovely blue eyes flash and twinkle—almost roguishly. And such a young mind—such a sex challenge still! Upon my word, if an old maid, like myself, can find him fascinating, what the widows feel I can't imagine."

Gertrude much disliked these remarks. She pursed her lips a little and smiled, but without geniality or conviction.

"An admirable host," chimed in Mrs. Gilbert. "And that delightful—what shall I call it?—that beaming manner, which always goes with a big heart."

"A very dear man, and as young and sympathetic

as a lark," declared Miss Protheroe gaily.

"So deeply interested in everything you say—that old-world courtesy and deference to our sex so rare now." added the vicar's wife.

"Papa is emotional," replied Gertrude stiffly.
"A heart of gold," declared Miss Protheroe. "A

dangerous man still."

Miss Westover hastily changed the subject and addressed Cherry, who was hearing about Adam's many virtues from Adam's mother and sister.

"If Mrs. Baker will forgive you, you had better tune the harp, Cherry," she said. "The admiral wants to hear you play. He remembers dear mamma's playing in the past."

"Music? How delightful!" murmured Miss Protheroe. "We get so little real music in Dawmouth

nowadays and I adore it."

Cherry, who would much have preferred to go on listening to the qualities of Adam Baker, rose at once and put her harp in tune. She looked exceedingly pretty in her white dinner-gown trimmed with lace about the throat. Unmarried women did not wear the bodice cut low at that date and revealed little of their arms above the elbow. Only the matrons blossomed out of low dresses and the time was still remote when young shoulders would flash upon the world.

Cherry and her gilt harp made an agreeable picture and presently, when the gentlemen appeared, she played to them. Her music was of no account. The

harp, if it is to be heard at all, demands great skill; but this Cherry lacked. She tinkled feebly "The March of the Men of Harlech," and everybody praised her.

Admiral Ryecroft urged Sir George to sing a song.

"You used to sing very finely," he said.

"A long time ago, my dear fellow. My singing days are done," replied the judge.

"Martino sang until he was sixty-five," said Miss

Protheroe.

"But not, I am sure, until he was seventy-six,"

replied Sir George.

Mr. Baker, however, consented to sing, and Gertrude accompanied him. His voice was a robust tenor of clerical quality. Then Gertrude played a piece called "Falling Waters," popular at that time, and her per-

formance gave great pleasure.

So the evening ended; cabs arrived and farewells were spoken. The young clergyman had designed to ask Sir George for a private meeting before he returned to his work. He wished to know whether Cherry's father would permit him to pay his court. But opportunity did not offer for the petition, and he determined to write from London.

He was seriously in love, but felt that the situation indicated by the younger Miss Westover, would demand to be made clear before, as a gentleman, he could proceed. At that time the word "gentleman" still conveyed a distinct meaning and carried with it obligations that many, who claimed the condition, were jealous to recognise. The distinction, however, already began to slip out of favour with the rising generation. The word "lady" also receded in significance. It already drifted down hill and "gentlewoman" was held to be a nicer distinction.

When everybody had gone to bed but himself, Sir

George stole on the tip of his toes to Johnny's bedroom, that he might satisfy himself of her state. He opened the door noiselessly and listened. She was sleeping and snoring steadily, much to his satisfaction. He therefore retreated and did not disturb her.

CHAPTER VI

In the morning their old servant's heroism appeared

and she cut a shining figure before the family.

Sir George, awakening at half past six and rising immediately, according to his custom, did a thing he not seldom enjoyed to do on a sunny morning. The dinner-party had done him good; he slept as soundly as usual and woke in physical comfort. When he had partially dressed, therefore, and donned his trousers, his shirt and dressing-gown, he went out on to the landing with his flute and played a brisk and cheerful melody.

This not unfamiliar sound often wakened Gertrude and Cherry, who slept within the near radius of the music; and it invariably brought Miss Johnston with an early cup of tea; for she also rose with the barn-

yard cocks.

Now she came, and the flute ceased, for Johnny presented an aspect unfamiliar at this hour. She brought no tea and she was attired in her black. Her face was full of the deepest melancholy.

"Good morning, Sir George. Stop fluting," she

said, "and come in your room."

He obeyed and she produced a foreign letter with a

heavy black edge.

"It's like this, Sir George," explained Johnny, while the old man stared at the letter she handed to him. "You know what that means, and so do I—only too bitter well. That's from Mrs. Bertram from India; and there's death in it. I took in the letters yesterday as usual, and I see this one for you, and I say instanter 'He's gone!' The Captain have gone! If it had been one of the children, he'd have broke it himself, but now, I say to myself, 'fever have done its work and he's dead.' He's been going from bad to worse, Sir George, for two years, and now he's gone. And so, I say this to myself. I say, 'Here's fatal news, and Sir George have got a dinner-party.' And so I ordained, Sir George, to hold up the letter for a day for your peace of mind, and so as the affair should go off while you were happy. And God knows how I've suffered, and if you say I did wrong, then I wish I may die."

The old man sighed deeply and stroked his head with his right hand. He rose, fetched his glasses from his dressing-table and opened the letter. Before he began

to read, he turned to the old woman.

"I have nothing but admiration for your good sense and your fortitude, my dear friend," he said. "To take this grief into your own heart and endure it secretly for the sake of others, was worthy of you, Johnny, and your steadfast good sense. I am proud of you. It was a brave and sagacious act. Such devotion will not be forgotten by our watching Father."

Relieved of her personal anxieties, Johnny wept, but not as she had wept on the previous day. She could not fail of gratification before this praise and it

lessened her grief at the coming blow.

Sir George read in silence—the letter of a young, new-made widow. Then his own tears began to fall

and he turned away.

"Leave me," he said. "You judged rightly. Charles Bertram, my dear son-in-law, is dead. He was doing the work of a travelling commissioner at the time, and, worn out with many anxious cares, has fallen a prey to dysentery. Go, Johnny, and tell my daughters that I want to see them."

Gertrude and Cherry came to him and heard the evil news.

They were deeply distressed, but not greatly surprised. Much disquieting news of Captain Bertram's health had reached them during the past two years. Family circumstances had made it necessary for him to accept an army commission in the past; to India he had gone and, after the Mutiny, returned home and wedded; but he was always a delicate man, of no constitution, and an arduous life in the tropics had now destroyed him untimely.

Sir George debated the sorrowful situation at breakfast. His large justice first commended Johnny's diplomacy, and when sufficient praise had been expended in that quarter, his intentions, flowing from a great heart and prejudiced opinion, were laid before

his two listeners.

"I always feared for him. You can bear me out, Gertrude, that I often doubted whether poor Charles was justified in undertaking the obligations and responsibilities of marriage. But he thought otherwise."

"He was examined at your wish, Papa, and the doctors all said he must be careful, but that there was

nothing really wrong with him."

"True, Cherry, and so there existed no grounds on which one might reasonably forbid the match. But I ever suspected its wisdom. However, they had the medical profession on their side, and I entertained great personal regard for Charles. A brave, religious and honest man. Now he is translated into a higher sphere and we have got to think of our dear Queenie. You will observe that she is with child. Forgive me for alluding to a subject of such delicacy, dear loves; but this is no moment for evading facts. She will stop in India until her little one is born and then, with her

three children, return to me. To me, and only to me, shall she come. Room must be made; our domestic arrangements must be modified, and everything done that power and affection prompt to lessen this cruel blow for the precious girl. Money sinks to unimportance before a challenge from one's own life's blood, and my desolated girl shall be dearly welcome to her father's home."

"Of course, Papa-poor Queenie."

"We will look on the stern, practical side," he continued. "That is represented by her babes—the eldest scarcely four years of age. Our incomparable Johnny has already declared an intention to devote herself to the nursery. Here, then, is God's Hand lifted on our behalf. The coming child may be a girl—I hope it will be—or it may prove a third boy; but be that as it will, a loving and accomplished nurse awaits them."

"Queenie will have a pension," said Gertrude.

"I was coming to that. A captain's widow should receive for herself something like two hundred a year, I fancy. Lord Clive's fund is also involved, I believe. Then each child gets something. A boy receives some support until he reaches the age of eighteen, and after that a small sum down, when his allowance ceases. All this must be looked into. It can be left very safely to me."

"Charles had two brothers, and neither has any children," said Gertrude. "I should think they might help. In fact Mr. Wilford Bertram, the head of the family, used to write to Charles and tell him that if he had a son to spare, he would be happy to adopt him. It was a jest, but meant in earnest."

"Not a jest, however, that one smiles upon, Gertrude. The facts of the Bertram family are these. The father of Charles was a gambler. He wasted, not only his own, but his wife's ample means in foolish and fruit-

less speculation. They were ruined, and the three sons, from expectation of wealth, suddenly found themselves called upon to face life and earn their living. Charles, the youngest, secured a commission in the Army; Harold married a wife with money and was contented to live upon her; while Wilford also married—beneath him if the truth must be told—and went into trade through his wife's connections."

"You can't call banking a trade, Papa."

"He is also largely interested in timber, my love, I have nothing against bankers, though personally I have always found them a cautious and needlessly suspicious sort of men. They are not helpful to a client when they might be. Nor have I a word to say against timber merchants. Timber merchants there must be. But trade is trade, and I confess that it would be very contrary to any wish of mine if a grandson were brought up in that atmosphere. Please God I shall live to see Queenie's boys complete their education and start upon their careers; and those careers must be such as I esteem and applaud. No descendant of the Westovers can go into business. That, I think, you will admit is obvious. Little Charles and little Wilford are my care. They must receive the education of gentlemen, and if their uncle, Wilford Bertram, finds himself disposed to assist in that matter I shall probably raise no objection; but the Services, or the learned professions, are obviously indicated for these boys."

"They are only three and four, Papa."

"I shall devote a little of my leisure to their education, Gertrude, and so ground them in the humanities, that when the time comes, they may go to school with necessary foundations of knowledge. But the point that I wish to make for the moment is this: there shall be no question whatever of Mr. Wilford Bertram de-

priving Queenie of one among her offspring. If the situation demands increased thrift and self-denial from us, then you brave girls and I are well able to meet it. In a word, this is my widowed daughter's home, and if some slight structural or other alterations are needed, we have ample time to make them. We must first heal the child's broken heart. I am not at all sure whether it may not be my duty to go to India to bring her home."

"Papa!" gasped Cherry.

"Indeed, Papa, that should not be necessary," declared Gertrude. "I must earnestly beg you not to consider that. Dear Mary has hosts of friends in India, and you know how highly Charles was valued. There will be many kind people to look after her—

everything possible will be done."

"Probably you are right, my Gerty; we will consider as to that. Meantime we must be practical, calm and foreseeing. A day nursery and night nursery are essential, and, of course, a room for Queenie. I apprehend no great difficulties there. But my first duty is to write to the girl and sustain her young spirit, as only I can, at this moment."

"Yes, indeed, Papa," murmured Cherry.

"Do not let me be disturbed, my loves. It is a letter that will occupy me till luncheon. My heart is heavy, and when that happens I always want to sink on to my knees and commune with my Maker."

"You shall not be disturbed, dear Papa," promised

Cherry.

He sighed, blew his nose and left them. They knew he would now be occupied for several hours, for he loved letter-writing, and devoted much time to a large correspondence with old friends.

"This is going to be difficult," said Gertrude, when

Sir George had left them.

"D'you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. Not about poor Mary. We have plenty of room; but Papa's attitude to the situation. If he intends to take this absurd line——"

Cherry flushed.

"Papa is never absurd, Gertrude."

"I mean about the Bertrams. Old Mrs. Bertram is a dear old lady, and very fond of Queenie; and Charles was Wilford Bertram's favourite brother. If Wilford wants to adopt one of the little boys, he ought to be allowed to do so."

"But the Westovers-"

"Nonsense, Cherry! Who on earth are the Westovers? Why not trade? Brewers are made into peers of the realm. So are bankers. Papa doesn't like bankers, because, over and over again, they have not seen their way to help him when he wanted them to do so."

"Papa's the soul of honour, and would never have asked for anything that wasn't right and proper."

"He's the soul of honour as you say, but he doesn't understand money. Wilford Bertram is the soul of honour too. He had to work, and he did work and is building up a fine position. He's tremendously clever, and he's got a very nice wife whether he married beneath him or not; and I think most certainly for the boy's own sake, that if they want to adopt their god-child—that's the second one—they ought to be allowed to do so."

"After all it's Queenie's affair. If she-"

"If she thinks of what is best for the child, she'll agree."

"Not if Papa doesn't approve."

"We must try to convince him, Cherry."

"She's sure to like that one best herself. Perhaps she'll marry again. Men always did adore her."

"Men don't adore ready-made families."

"It's fearfully sad. Do you think we ought to

applaud Johnny any more?"

"No. That's another thing. I'm not at all sure if Johnny ought to be their nurse. I remember very well, when we were small, how she used to make favourites, and bully some of us and spoil others."

"But she always liked boys. She was always good

to Wingate."

"She did her best to ruin Wingate."

"Nothing could ruin Wingate," declared Cherry, who worshipped her brother.

"Will Johnny want more money?" she asked.

"No; she never wants money—except to spend on somebody else. She's as bad as Papa in that way."

"I shall help you in all your difficulties, dear Ger-

trude."

"I am sure you will, Cherry. There are going to be plenty of opportunities for you."

Cherry kissed Gertrude.

"How far the dinner-party seems away," she said, sighing. "Did you—what did you think of Mr. Baker, Gerty?"

"I think he's a very good and well-meaning man;

but he's fearfully High, Cherry."

"I know."

At luncheon Sir George had recovered something of his unconquerable spirit. He had written a letter that pleased him and invited his daughters to read it. This they promised to do. It extended over many pages.

"I go," he said, "to purchase mourning stationery this afternoon. I shall not re-write the letter: my child will understand; but the envelope must bear the

marks of my sorrow."

He spoke of the dinner-party to distract their minds. "A small thing in the shadow of this cloud, but eminently successful. We shall look back on it with placid memories. Much time I fear must pass before we can give another entertainment. Delightful people—delightful people."

He discussed his guests with generous praises.

"Dear old Ryecroft—a bulwark—a bulwark of all that is most right and worthy; the vicar—admirably sound. He says nothing will stop him from preaching in his black gown as long as he can ascend the pulpit stairs. A great man in his way. And Miss Protheroe! What sparkle—what humour! How she escaped a husband I cannot imagine. She said some daring things; but these cosmopolitan women, who have resided in the Chancelleries of Europe, will be daring. Mrs. Baker, too. There is something restful about her. She knows life on small means, and financial restrictions have not soured her. Why should they? Remind me, Cherry, that I have promised her some of my little seedling dates and one of my little trees grown from the pip of a Mandarin orange. These things give her pleasure."

"How did you like Mr. Adam Baker, Papa?" asked Gertrude, for Cherry's benefit. She sympathised deeply

with Cherry in this matter, but hoped little.

"Mr. Adam Baker," replied Sir George, "is a man of high principles and I should wish to respect him; but I'm bound to say that I see dangers looming in his path. His sentiments are noble in essence, but I fear for him. There is a latitude and an insensibility to peril. I will not say that he indicates levity—though one remark he made was in the worst taste—but my fear for the young man lies in his guides. He not only reads dangerous authors, but quotes them. If a clergy-

man must quote, let him quote the inspired Word and nothing else. He should find there all that he can possibly require to illuminate his own mind and the minds of other people."

Cherry lowered her strained glance to her plate. "Drink a glass of port, Papa," said Gertrude.

"You're eating nothing."

"Perhaps at dinner, my love; not now. I must get into the air. I will not ask either of you to join my constitutional this afternoon. I want to be alone."

"Of course, Papa. Shall I write to our guests? They will be paying their after-dinner calls in a day

or two."

"No, let them come," he answered. "It is a test of true friendship that we can admit them into our sorrows as well as our joys. A fig for the acquaintance who evade us in time of trouble."

CHAPTER VII

WITH the advance of spring, Sir George found great solace and interest in his garden. William Fry asked that his boy, now fifteen years old, might be allowed permanently to assist him at small wages, and so begin to learn his business. To this his master agreed.

"I am glad," said Sir George, "that he will follow your grand old trade, William;" and then he improved

the occasion according to his wont.

William was planting seeds at the time and desisted from his labours, glad to rest his back. He did not always understand his new employer and did not always agree with him, but entertained a great measure

of respect and admiration.

"The gardener's task was the first put upon mankind by our Creator, Fry, and those who tend the fruits of the earth and minister to the life of the vegetable kingdom, enjoy immense privileges, for they are called to consider the works of God at close hand—an ennobling pursuit at any time. In the factory, or machine shop, a man only ministers to the work of man—a far less inspiring operation in my judgment; but the gardener marks Omnipotence at work and should be so much the better for it."

Fry nodded.

"'Tis true, Sir George. God have got His finger in every pie, especially where there's a garden."

"A homely method of stating a great truth, William.

I don't quarrel with it."

"I don't quarrel neither, sir. I'd be very sorry to

quarrel with God; but sometimes—as a gardener, Sir George—more as a gardener than a Christian—I catch myself wishing the Almighty would leave a little more to me. There's a lot He do in a garden I don't hold with—speaking as a professed gardener you understand—and a lot He don't do as He well might. We're told, Sir George, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him. Well, I never see a sparrow fall to the ground. I wish I did. I'd like to see the whole baggering breed of sparrows fall to the ground, Sir George, and not get up again. And bullfinches! Did you ever think upon them, Sir George?"

"A beautiful little bird and faithful to its spouse. One of the most attractive features of the bullfinch,

Fry, is its more than human fidelity."

"They'm faithful to the pear trees, I grant. If you was to look under they pear trees, your honour, you'd know what I mean. Ban't no good as I can see putting a promise of brave blooth on pear and plum and then sending they dratted bud-hawks to tear 'em off again."

"In old days, William, the community was offered a reward of three pence for each of those engaging birds that it destroyed; and I may tell you that three pence was worth a great deal more then than now."

"A very fine custom, Sir George. I wish it would

come in again."

"Nature is full of mysteries, Fry—full of mysteries."

"Darnation full, Sir George. If the Almighty would look after nature now!"

"God surely does so, William."

"Oh no, begging your honour's pardon. I'm sure nature does a lot of things what God would blush to do."

The elder laughed and went his way. Nature had often puzzled him both in the larger world and his

own heart. Many mysteries met his thought which he found it impossible to resolve or explain. So he left them alone. Undoubtedly the needs of man clashed with the operations of nature, and while she assisted him, it seemed that she was only willing to do so after he had tamed her and broken her in; but this appeared reasonable and just, seeing that Sir George believed man the supreme and paramount fact of nature, created to reign over her and direct her operations for his own comfort and support. He could understand the human triumph; but not the powers accorded to nature of a distinctly antisocial character. Why were war, famine, earthquake, shipwreck and pestilence permitted? Why did nature decline to kiss the rod and yield to the being created in God's own image? Disasters were the will of the Creator and, as such, to be received with submission; but certain disasters, the cause of which could by no means be traced to original sin, awoke in him deep and uneasy reflections. He rejected the true explanation, however, and believed himself to be in the line of correct conclusions. The Enemy of Man lay at the root of all human inconvenience and disappointment, and Satan's power, depending entirely upon human depravity, might in the last resort account for the bad manners of the bullfinch and earthquake alike. When man acknowledged his Maker and obeyed the divine precepts in spirit and in truth, then Sir George felt good reason to believe the victory of evil over nature would weaken and human bonds be loosened. But that time was not yet.

He examined his young plants. A gift from India—seed of the great sky-blue convolvulus—was germinating freely. Already he saw it making an azure dome of loveliness in his stove-house. It was the old man's favourite flower, and anticipation, when another autumn should come, went far to soothe his mind.

But the day brought two incidents of very disquieting nature—one concerning his son, in the shape of a letter at noon; the other involving Sarah. He held himself responsible for all those who dwelt beneath his roof; and although, when Gertrude explained after luncheon that it would be necessary for her father to speak with Sarah, Sir George protested, and declared that Johnny could be trusted to meet such a case, yet, when he heard of the enormity reported, he found that

he himself must deal with it.

"No, Papa," said Gertrude. "Johnny won't do it, and I won't do it. It was Johnny who told me about the affair this morning. I shouldn't have listened to Johnny discussing Sarah in an ordinary way, because she and the cook are hating Sarah for the moment. You know how servants always take sides. That's nothing. They'll all be friends again in a week. She's a splendid worker and a very nicely-tempered girl, and I'm not going to part with her for either of them. But Johnny had something to report that you would not approve of at all. Of course, as far as churchgoing is concerned, I shouldn't have listened to Johnny. She always escapes herself. She invariably has a headache, or a cold coming on every Sunday morning, and she sits and eats dried ginger and other horrid things, and only brightens up again in the evening; but Sarah -well, Sarah went to the Roman Catholic chapel last night; and she came home and said she liked it! And we're responsible to her parents for Sarah."

"Went to the Roman Catholic chapel, Gertrude! I will see her at once," he replied. "Send the woman to my study in five minutes. Does she know her

peril?"

"Not in the least, Papa."

"Then it is more than time she did."

Sarah appeared before him presently-a hulking

maiden of nineteen—tall, stalwart, with large, cowlike brown eyes and a wide, indeterminate mouth. She

was very nervous and already tearful.

"What shocking thing is this I hear concerning your Sabbath activities, Sarah?" asked Sir George, more in sorrow than anger. He shook his white head at the girl as he advanced the inquiry.

"Please, Sir, I didn't know as there was any harm," she explained. "I thought it was all one, Sir, so long

as I went somewhere."

"If heaven and hell are all one, wretched girl, then perhaps it was all one—not otherwise. There must be a screw loose—a screw loose, Sarah."

"I was trying 'em all, Sir George-chapels and all-

to see which I liked bestest."

"Trying them all—the conventicles also? What astounding perversity is this? Were you never taught the gulfs that lie between truth and falsehood, Sarah?"

"My father was a great one for variety, Sir."

"Was he? Then no doubt you inherit this dreadful weakness. But know that you have committed a dangerous error, girl—a very perilous fault indeed. With God there is no shadow of changing. God does not favour variety, Sarah. Why should we pander to this unholy craving, after we have once secured everlasting truth? In future worship at the parish church, and only the parish church. There you are safe if you pray aright. And eschew St. Jude's. St. Jude's may be likened to a Roman Catholic wolf disguised in a Protestant fleece—a half-way house to papacy."

"Lor, Sir! I went there the Sunday before,"

confessed Sarah.

"And not the first who has gone there as a steppingstone to worse things—not the first! How long, O Lord, how long?" cried Sir George, in a voice of despair. Then he turned to Sarah and some mental inspiration led him to continue a recent train of thought for her benefit.

"Have you ever paused to remember that Satan has been, as it were, put into our hands—that our God has left this fallen angel for man to deal with; and that when you went into that den of idolatry you were strengthening the power of the Evil One by your rash act? Has that occurred to you, Sarah?"

She confessed that the idea had never struck her.

"Lor, Sir-no!" said Sarah.

"Nevertheless that is what happened. We will not dwell upon it. Forget all that you saw and all that you heard and all that you smelt, Sarah. Let it pass away, like an ugly dream. Pray your Heavenly Father to forgive you, Sarah; and since you evidently sinned in abject ignorance, I can promise you that He will do so. But never again—never again run these hideous risks now that you know that it is very wrong. And tell your father the next time you see him what I have told you. Give him clearly to understand, my girl, that variety in matters of religion is nothing less than the sin against the Holy Ghost. Impress that upon him, Sarah. The true road is strait, and see that henceforth you walk in it. I would rather deal with an empty mind, such as yours, than one already full of pernicious opinions. Begin again, therefore; recollect that you are baptised into the blessed Protestant Church and have your foothold on the sure and only Rock of Salvation; and should any further difficulties or problems rise up to threaten you, bring them to me at once. Now, good-bye, Sarah. Remember to pray for pardon, and go twice every Sunday henceforth to your parish church. That is my own rule, and you cannot do better."

Sarah promised to obey in every particular and with-

drew; but it was some time before her master recovered peace of mind. He held that an incident of very great gravity had faced him; then another, laden with personal issues, now called for his consideration and Sarah was presently forgotten.

There had come a letter from Wingate Westover, the judge's son, and he grew much perturbed after reading

it.

He summoned Gertrude and Cherry.

"Don your bonnets and jackets," he said, "and we will take a walk. I want you both this afternoon. Your brother has written a very disquieting letter."

"He isn't ill, Papa?" cried Cherry.

"No, no; he isn't ill, unless it be in mind. But, he challenges me with startling problems and has

developed new and very amazing ambitions."

As they walked through the budding lanes, and Sir George stopped sometimes to examine a flower, or look over a gate at the view, he told them that his son was weary of the lawyer's office, felt that he could never excel in that profession, and pined for a new and very different life.

"One's first inclination is to protest," said Sir George, "and indeed I shall do so; but Wingate is no ordinary man. I have always maintained that he possesses considerable parts. He has not yet revealed them, and the law never much attracted him; but——"

"Don't let him leave it, Papa," urged Gertrude. "It would be a cruel thing after all you have spent. You

must be firm-indeed you must."

"What does he want to do?" asked Cherry.

"There is great activity in South Africa," explained her father. "That country appears capable of immense development, and the pioneers are busy. Wingate apparently has an intense desire to join those pioneers. Possessing, as he does, my vitality and energy, he feels that the office stool-in fact he has evidently thought a great deal on the subject and believes now that South Africa beckons. The land possesses great mineral wealth-gold, in fact, and huge beds of diamonds. To seek wealth for itself is demoralising and I should not support any such ambition; but the unselfish and heroic labour of the pioneer is quite a different matter."

"I beg and implore you won't countenance it, Papa," said Gertrude. "It is a whim. No doubt half the young men in London want to rush out there and waste their time trying to find gold. Wingate isn't a pioneer in the least. He's far too fond of comfort and pleasure. It's just a craze for novelty. He hasn't the vaguest idea of roughing it, and where is the money to come from? He's got to get there, and he can't go to a wild place like that without a proper outfit."

"Wingate must justify his existence, my love, as we all must. This may be, as you say, a whim; but I think not—I fear not. I am inclined to believe he has turned the matter over very thoroughly and only

writes to me when his own mind is assured."

"Do you want him to go, Papa?" asked Cherry.

"No," he answered firmly. "I do not. I would very much rather he stayed in England and proceeded with the life I had thought good; but I do not lack for imagination, and it is idle to deny that Wingate has long shown a disinclination to the law—much to my regret. We must keep open minds and hear a great deal more upon the subject."

"I would point out, Papa, that dear Queenie's return next autumn with her three infants must put a grave strain on your resources. It has to be, and nobody loves her more than I do, and nobody will try to make up for her great sorrow more than I shall; but the expenses will be considerable. These are necessary expenses and must be met. But for Wingate to give up his work and waste all you've spent to get it for him, and then demand the fearful cost of an outfit and passage to the Cape of Good Hope and so on—it's

simply unthinkable at present, Papa."

"Well put, Gertrude. At present it certainly is unthinkable. We must be reasonable, and Wingate must be reasonable. To-morrow I shall write to him at length and indicate many factors of the problem that he has not considered. First is Queenie—far more important than anything else. But she is safe with her father, and a man must always be a larger and more formidable question than a woman. The time, however, is not ripe. I fully recognise that this is not the moment to launch Wingate on a new career. He shall be patient and wait my convenience."

"I dare say he'll have forgotten all about it in six months," said Gertrude, relieved at her father's atti-

tude.

"I think not. He appears much in earnest and writes with his usual intelligence and conviction; but he must learn that at present it is quite beyond my power to assist him in any way. I shall explain the nature of my obligations and direct him to wait for a full year. Then, if he is still of the same mind and convinced that his destiny lies in our South African Colony, I will assist him to set out."

"Make it a full year, Papa," urged Gertrude, "and

tell him that that is the minimum."

"Poor Wingate," murmured Cherry. "I expect he

is dreaming dreams of gold and diamonds."

"I hope not," declared Sir George. "I would not have him enter upon any such enterprise for crude lust of gain, Cherry."

"But all pioneers want to make something out of it,"

she argued.

"You are very wrong," he said. "Consider Living-

stone, who has carried the Bible into the tropic fastnesses of the Congo. No, my love; the Christian pioneer will always take with him a more precious thing than any he can ever hope to find."

"Try to write to-day, Papa, while you see the situation so clearly," begged Gertrude.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR GEORGE WESTOVER was not one at any time to press his own rights, though none the less, when they were ignored, and thoughtless or ignorant people denied him such attention and respect as were justly his due, he noticed the fact. "I regret, while I do not resent," he used to say; but where courtesy was paid and he received recognition proper to his age and posi-

tion, he responded swiftly.

He was invited to accept the Commission of the Peace—a circumstance which gratified him not a little. Ever quick to react at the touch of mental stimulant, he accepted the compliment and devoted assiduous attention to his new duties. He was always amazingly busy and, as the summer developed, her father caused Gertrude uneasiness, for with the garden, the Bench and his studies, she feared he worked too hard. His acquaintance also increased, and he often accepted invitations to tea, occasionally with people of whom his daughters knew little. He made friends among his fellow magistrates, and he enjoyed a new hobby, for, thrice a week, he engaged a little open phaeton. he drove himself, and Gertrude or Cherry generally accompanied him. There was a small seat behind and William Fry's son, Richard, in Sir George's livery and cocked hat, had been exalted to this position. "turn-out" as people called it, began to be well-known. Did a daughter join him, Richard also came, but occasionally Sir George willed to drive without either of them and, when this happened, the household felt relieved upon his return. His steed was an old irongrey pony without ambition, and the pace he usually

left for the animal itself to determine.

Then, during a brief summer vacation, Mr. Adam Baker visited Dawmouth and, the time being ripe for action in the young man's opinion, he made a morning appointment with Sir George and formally begged to be allowed to pay court to Cherry Westover. Cherry herself knew this was about to happen. She regarded such a step as an essential preliminary to any engagement, and her premonition of failure and consequent disappointment had been discounted long before the event. Adam, however, felt more sanguine. He was not ignorant of the old man's deeply founded antipathies, but supposed them to be exaggerated, for he had heard his mother declare her new friend to be wise, far-seeing, and by no means devoid of sympathy for youth.

"Indeed," declared Mrs. Baker, who understood the situation, "he is astoundingly young himself. He surprises Dawmouth by his boyish vision and his ingenuous pursuits. To see him play a game of croquet is a liberal education. Such zest for the game, such a scrupulous sense of fairness, such delight at victory and such perfect control of temper when defeated! And, underlying his hopeful and trustful spirit, such

firm convictions and perfect faith."

"His convictions are the only thing I'm afraid of," confessed Adam. "Miss Westover says there are cer-

tain things that will be the touchstone."

But Mrs. Baker entertained the highest admiration for her son, and she was well satisfied with Cherry, whose indeterminate character she believed that Adam would swiftly strengthen.

"Sir George is not without tolerance," she declared. "He often says that we must grant to the young a rea-

sonable measure of liberty, that they may develop character and win those qualities necessary for leadership, when their turn comes."

The meeting proved friendly and amiable but, as Adam suspected, Sir George was not prepared to disregard any point that he held to be vital. Similar propositions had been laid before the parent, and he had no intention to raise difficulties if they could be avoided. He liked Mr. Baker, believed that he was doing good work and granted that, socially, no objection existed to him; while as for Cherry he considered that she might make an efficient and satisfactory clergyman's wife—for the right clergyman. He displayed no immediate opposition, therefore, and upon the question of means preserved an open mind, since he knew that, at his mother's death, Adam must enjoy a sufficiency. Adam's sister was engaged to a wealthy man.

"Upon the general question, which you very properly bring to me," said Sir George, "I have nothing to say, Mr. Baker. You are not without knowledge of life, and have reached an age when you are justified in looking forward and considering the great advantages and blessings of the married state. So far I would give you permission, without any condition, to approach my girl and endeavour to win her love. But we will now view the possibility on higher grounds, and frankness is essential. When you did me the honour to dine with me last spring, I observed that you permitted yourself quotations from certain eminent authors. Now I do not recollect that I quarrelled with the quotations themselves, and I applaud the young man who commits to memory the wise thoughts of his betters. It has always been my own practice, though, outside the Bible and Shakespeare, I have not found much to be worth the effort. But your citations come from exceedingly

modern works whose writers are gravely suspect in certain directions. We will, however, leave that. I am the last to deny liberty of thought and conscience to the rising generation; but such liberty must move safely within the barriers of our faith. You agree?"

"Certainly, Sir George. I hope no secular opinions

will ever cloud my faith."

"Exactly. Now in a case of this kind there are certain test questions for the parent of a daughter or so it appears to me; and upon the nature and attributes of the suitor those questions must be based. In your case you are a clergyman, and the answers to those questions, involving as it does the eternal as well as the temporal, is all important. I know that you belong to an advanced band in the Protestant Church of England, Mr. Baker—a band whose activities and opinions are in the highest sense unattractive to me; but I have yet to learn how far you permit yourself to go. All depends on that. Hence the test questions of which I speak. Needless to say this is no inquisition, and you are not bound to answer them; but silence must be very inconvenient none the less. Do you, who draw the pay of the English Church, confess yourself a Protestant clergyman and supporter of the glorious Reformation?"

The old man's blue eyes searched Adam's face, and the young man perceived that Sir George designed to

go to the roots.

"Let me be quite sure what you mean by 'Protes-

tant,' Sir," he said.

"If you are not sure, Mr. Baker, then I confess we have reached the parting of the ways even sooner than I feared it possible. There are papists and there are apeists, as has been poignantly observed, and I take a Protestant to be one who daily thanks God that he is neither. For myself I despise and detest them both—

in the truest, highest spirit of religion—in the spirit manifested by our Lord and Saviour, when He likened the Scribes and Pharisees to whited sepulchres and cast the money changers from the temple."

Sir George had grown pink, and from his heightened

complexion his eyes glittered.

"The House of Faith has many mansions," murmured Adam. "I venture to suspect that——"

"Pardon me, there is no question of venturing, or suspecting in this matter. Truth has been vouchsafed us beyond any peradventure or suspicion whatsoever. You have told me—you, a Church of England minister—that you do not exactly know what I mean by 'Protestant.' May I, then, ask what you mean by 'Protestant'?"

"Those who think as I do, Sir George, deprecate the Reformation; nay, they deplore it. Their instinct and conviction lead them to believe that, far from advancing the cause of Christ and His desire for union and fellowship and universal good-will, the Reformation threw us back, and confounded the Divine Purpose. Our hope and desire is to create, as it were a bridge, by which the opposed bodies may in course of time come together again, merge their differences, renew their solid front and move to the conquest of the whole earth under one glorious banner—the oriflamme of Christ Himself."

"Your sympathies lying with papacy, idolatry and domination of the Civil by the Spiritual power?"

"I conceive the Church of Rome to be nearer the eternal truths than the Church of England," said Mr. Baker firmly.

"You would advocate the worship of images and

auricular confession?"

"Images, no, Sir George. I find sanction for auricular confession in the New Testament." "Public confession by all means. It is right that we should let our Maker know that we are aware of the melancholy plight in which we find ourselves. Let every man confess to Heaven that he is a miserable sinner, and ask God's mercy upon his fallen state. But to divulge our private and particular failings, temptations and errors of commission and omission—to lay them bare to a fellow sinner—no! The thought is infamy—sacrilege. Shall I seek a starveling curate—I who have fought and fallen and risen again and wrestled with evil, as Jacob with the angel? Shall I, old in struggle and old in sin, confide my agonies and my triumphs, my secrets and my temptations to you, Mr. Baker? I trow not, Sir. I trow not!"

"Not to me, Sir George; but to one of your own generation—some wise priest and counsellor of ripe

years and wide sympathies and understanding."

"And why? Where shall a man find sympathy, understanding and wisdom greater than his Maker's? My generation, Mr. Baker, has nothing to do with these abominations, founded in priest-craft. It was to destroy those atrocious institutions that the Lord's Reformers rose and smote! I will say no more, nor is there any necessity for you to do so. You have my prayers, Mr. Baker. I shall pray that the Almighty will direct you to read the History of the Reformation and that, from study of those sublime events, you may come to perceive that the bridge of which you speak can never be created. At this moment men of Christian purpose and good-will are endeavouring to destroy the foundations of any such abominable bridge. ritualist clergyman at Brighton has just defied the Privy Council. Woe to him! We are organising an Anti-Ritualistic Petition, Mr. Baker, and I shall be interested to learn what the Archbishops will do when they are confronted with it. We wish to strengthen

their weak knees and support their faltering hands, Sir."

Sir George rose and Adam reached for his hat and stick. It was a soft, felt hat, which in itself the elder resented on a clergyman's head.

"I accept your decision, Sir George."

"There can be no alternative but to do so, Mr. Baker."

"It is a very deep sorrow to me," said Adam.

"You shall not lack my sympathy. I, too, regret the situation your lamentable opinions have created; but a father's duty was never clearer. Good morning, Mr. Baker."

Sir George shook hands. He made himself do so; but he loathed what he had heard and his detestation extended in some measure to the tall and dejected man who now departed with heavy footsteps. He resented the necessity for this interview. It meant one of two things; either that Cherry had known the truth and concealed it from her father, or that Mr. Baker had concealed it from Cherry. He preferred to believe the curate at fault. Perfidy and evasion would too surely come as second nature to one who held his opinions.

At lunch Sir George preserved a very unusual taciturnity, and both Cherry and her sister knew that all was lost. It surprised neither of them, and when their father invited the younger to walk with him during the afternoon, she consented to do so.

"We will climb to Haldon and win a breath of the

moorland air," said Sir George.

Cherry was a better walker than Gertrude and could keep pace with her father. They ascended the long hill to a wild land of heather and pine, breasted the lane that led upward through heavy woods and anon found themselves at the summit, where presently they sat together. Not until now did Sir George discuss

the grave matter in his mind. He had trudged up the stiff hill with his umbrella over his shoulder and his usual elasticity of step; but now he was warm. He mopped his face and plunged immediately into the matter.

"To-day, my Cherry, the Reverend Adam Baker has asked my permission to pay his court to you; and it has been my duty to deny him that privilege. I know, of course, that you have seen a reasonable amount of each other and acquired some understanding and appreciation, each for the other's character, before he took that step. I, too, had studied Mr. Baker with an open mind, and saw no little to admire in him; but I grieve to say, Cherry, that upon certain subjects, where an open mind must be impossible, we do not see eye to eye. In a word he is a ritualist in the full and dreadful significance of the term. Need I say more?"

"I knew you had decided against him, Papa, when you did not ask him to stay to lunch. He came to-day, because it was his birthday, and he hoped it

would bring him good luck."

"These trivial data are beside the point, my love. I am beyond measure sorry if you already shared his interest and felt any interchange of affection—beyond measure sorry; but am I right in assuming that you only allowed yourself to dwell upon him in thought as a man, and were ignorant of the truth concerning him as a clergyman? I should like to feel clear on this aspect of the case."

"I knew he was advanced, Papa."
"But how much did you know?"

"We never discussed religion. He asked me to hear him preach, but when he told me that it would be at St. Jude's, I told him that you would not wish it."

"Quite right, my love; and I'm bound to say that

on the strength of that assurance it might have been more seemly if the subject had dropped."

"It did, Papa. We left it vague."

"Such questions must never be vague. But it is your character to create an undefined and ambiguous atmosphere in your approach to your fellow-creatures. When I tell you, however, that Mr. Baker approves of auricular confession and looks with amiable eyes upon Church of Rome——"

"Oh, dear, Papa, does he?"

"Indeed he does; and these aberrations should have been made clear before he permitted interest to waken for him in your heart."

"It will be quite out of the question, of course."

"You see that and feel it? I knew you must do so. I have told him that I shall pray for him, my dear girl."

"So will I, Papa."

"No, Cherry; in your case such a step is not indicated. To pray for him is to remember him and that would be undesirable. Pray for all in the outer darkness and peril, where he unhappily stands for the moment; pray for all in general terms. But do not please lift any petition for Adam Baker as an individual. As an individual, forget him. Nature is nature, and since Adam Baker attracted you on nature's humble plane, we can say nothing. But brought to the higher court, he proves for ever debarred by his own dreadful disabilities from the privilege of having you for wife. And it affords me the deepest sorrow to tell you so."

The young woman made no protest and advanced no argument. To oppose her father was a step beyond her imagination. In truth to her the vital point was nothing, for her religion, in common with her other emotions, existed as a mere surface movement on the stream of her placid existence. She could not feel deeply. She would have become a ritualist, a nonconformist, or a Buddhist without any protest from conscience. But to oppose her father was a far more serious matter. Such malleable stuff was incapable of more active suffering than a horse, who dimly feels his beans have been forgotten, but eats his hay without protest or resentment. Not until the night came and she was alone, did Cherry shed a mild tear or two to see her shadowy romance dislimn and vanish. Her father suffered more than she. But Sir George's grief centred on Mr. Baker's convictions rather than his disappointment.

They returned home in a silence but fitfully broken, and when the time came for music after dinner that night. Cherry's father would only hear the slow move-

ment from the great sonata.

When the piano was shut, Sir George sighed and turned to "The Morning Post," which to-day had been neglected. A financial incident roused him.

"A new French Loan for one thousand, six hundred million pounds!" he exclaimed. "And these fellows pretended that Germany plundered them after the war! Rascals! Rascals!"

He much disliked and distrusted the French, holding their levity, impiety and greed a thorn in the side of

Europe.

Occasionally the old man lifted an extempore petition with evening prayers, and on this night, when the household was gathered together, he prayed, "that it may please God in His own good time, to lift the clouds of superstition and Satanic temptation from the hearts of His servants, and reveal to erring and benighted men the true, the narrow, and the only way."

Gertrude led and Cherry joined in the "Amen"

which concluded this appeal.

CHAPTER IX

WINGATE WESTOVER, in his usual flamboyant fashion, assured Sir George that delay might very likely mean the loss of a great fortune in Africa. He agreed, however, to his father's wishes and it was understood that he resign from the law during the following year and then return home to complete his preparations. There came news from India that Mary Bertram had borne another son and would be returning to England during November.

No event of significance marked the autumn, save the great triumph of Sir George's Indian convolvulus. Everybody was invited to visit it, and none forbore to do so. Much tea-drinking accompanied the rite, and on one occasion a luncheon party was given to new friends who drove from a distance. The convolvulus gave great pleasure, and Sir George promised seeds to everybody who desired them. He was especially assiduous in his support of Cherry after her disappointment, and proposed many suggestions for her pleasure and distraction. He wrote to his sister at Honiton, acquainted her privately with Cherry's sad experience and begged her to invite the young woman on a visit.

This Lady Warner promised to do. She found Cherry "tasteless and colourless," as she confessed to her own friends, and she regretted that an opportunity to provide her with a husband had not been taken. To her it had mattered little what religious views Mr. Baker entertained, so long as he preserved his enthusi-

asm for Cherry. Her niece spent a fortnight with the old lady and then returned home. She and her aunt were equally wearied by the incident, for they possessed no idea in common.

It was during her absence, that walking with Gertrude to take his constitutional along Dawmouth sea wall, Sir George committed violence and awoke enthusiasm for himself in some quarters, condemnation in others.

Descending through a paved street, where dwelt the poorer people, they came upon an elderly fisherman beating a small boy, while the child screamed bitterly and a few loafers watched the scene without seeking to end it. But the old Indian swiftly intervened. His eyes blazed, his forehead wrinkled and with amazing agility he leapt upon the younger man. From its usual place upon his shoulder he brought down his umbrella, shouted with indignation and began to belabour his opponent.

"Wretched fellow!" he cried. "How dare you

torture a child in my presence?"

After three blows he stopped, and his victim, dropping a strap, stared with amazement upon him. The boy, finding himself free, dived into a doorway and vanished.

Sir George glared and put his umbrella back on his shoulder. The fisherman, having recovered from his surprise, began to get very angry. As his passion increased, Sir George grew calm again and ceased to pant. A crowd collected—men and women. Gertrude dragged at her father's arm, but he declined to depart. Then the longshoreman exploded.

"You bloody old fool!" he roared. "Who the hell are you to touch me? For two pins I'd knock your silly face in. That blasted boy's my own grandchild, and his father's dead and he's the terror of the street:

and if I'm not to hammer the fear of God into him, who be?"

"Miserable man!" retorted Sir George. "How do you dare address a holder of the Commission of the Peace in this foul and disgusting fashion? That the boy was your own flesh and blood makes your brutality and cowardice even worse than before. Have you reached your age without knowing that to correct a child when in a passion is a disgrace and an outrage? If he errs, that is no reason why you should do so: and to tell me that a boy of such tender years is the terror of this alley is to confess yourself and everybody concerned a pack of fools. Send the child to me at Belmont Lodge to-morrow. Wash him and attire him in his best clothes, if he has any, but that is not essential. I will see him, speak with him, and reason with him. Do not imagine that I am averse from the rod—far from it! Nobody was whipped oftener than myself some seventy years ago. But to flog a bad boy is a task not to be entered upon in hot blood on a public highway. And for yourself, mariner—if such you are—put a guard upon your lips, sweeten your speech and never mention the Almighty save with reverence."

The people stared and Sir George, unmoved, proceeded on his way. Rough words were shouted after him, but he paid no attention to them, and in deepest agitation Gertrude begged him to move more quickly. He did not, however, hasten his steps.

Her father discoursed at length upon the outrage. "One is filled with wholesome fury to see horrors of such a kind," he said; "but let it be understood, when this 'terror of the street' comes to see me, that I am prepared to grant him an audience. He shall be scolded and fortified to take a worthier view of his responsibilities in a civilised, or semi-civilised community."

"He won't come, Papa," declared Gertrude, but her father protested.

"'Won't come,' my love? As a Justice of the Peace,

I directed that he should come."

"This isn't India, Papa. I think you often, naturally, forget the difference between your powers there and here."

He laughed at the recollection.

"Indeed, I am reminded of the difference frequently. I was about to give a rascal six months' hard labour from the Bench only a week ago. The ruffian had horribly maltreated a cart-horse. But, to my astonishment, the magistrate's clerk informed me that my powers permitted no such sentence! Now that was vastly entertaining to one who had held the balance between life and death over many thousands."

His daughter, however, proved correct. The dangerous boy from the back street avoided the opportunity of reformation offered him, and Gertrude, on one pretext or another, was careful to prevent her

father from again taking that way to the sea.

During November there came home Mary Bertram and her children. Wingate Westover met the troopship that brought them, and saw his sister to Paddington, while Sir George, Gertrude and Cherry awaited the train at Dawmouth.

A small, black-clad figure alighted, and was quickly in her father's arms; but his were the tears that flowed, not hers. Mary kept calm, kissed her family and introduced her offspring. She held one little pale-faced boy by the hand, while from the carriage lumbered two ayahs, each carrying another. Sir George's wet eyes brightened at the sight of the Indian women. They brought back the scents of the East. But they were both unhappy and weary. He spoke to them in Hindustani and gathered that their one hope in life

was to return home again as swiftly as possible. They

had suffered much on the sea.

"Johnny will soon make them happy," he said. "She understands their needs in every respect and has always preferred native servants to those of her own race. They will regain their self-respect with her."

"They can soon go home," explained Mary.

Then her father caressed her again and regarded her eldest son with interest.

"He is like his dear father, Queenie," he said.

Meantime they drifted to the luggage van, and Gertrude took the lead. Mrs. Bertram hastened to help, while Cherry guided the ayahs and babies to a closed carriage awaiting them. Mary resembled Cherry, but whereas the maiden seemed a sketch—graceful and attractive, though incomplete and indecisive as to detail—the younger woman was a finished picture possessing the other's charm and adding thereto clean, fine drawing, decision, definition and character. Mary Bertram was a pretty woman, with a graceful figure, a clear voice and bright grey eyes. She possessed character and a sense of humour. She kept up a good courage under the ordeal of her widowed home-coming and shed no tear until the evening of that day, when her children were in bed and asleep.

They heard the sad particulars of her husband's death and how she and her eldest son had walked behind the gun-carriage at his funeral. She mourned him quietly and spoke with admiration of the dead man's best friend.

"After me and the children, he loved Colonel Harold Forrester better than anybody in the world," she said. "Harold was with Charles when he died, and he has been very, very good to me—an angel of goodness."

"I shall write to him and express my deep gratitude, my precious girl," declared Sir George.

She described the funeral and the immense respect

and wide-spread sorrow at her husband's death.

"His old friend, the Rajah of Kolpartha, wrote me a most beautiful letter in a cloth-of-gold envelope," Mary told them. "You must see it. I've brought very little back, except his medals and sword to keep as heirlooms for his boys."

She thanked her father presently for letting her

return to him.

"But I have my pension and allowances," she said, and must soon find a tiny home for myself. We

shall manage all right."

"Consider no such project, Queenie. Your father's home is yours so long as he has an earthly home," declared the old man. "Dear Charles will know that his family is safe enough with me. You must take your old place, and dearly welcome back to it; while your boys will be my special care, and I shall presently lay sound foundations for their education."

"Charles and Wilford can hardly speak anything

but Hindustani," she said.

"They are beautiful children, but very pale," mur-

mured Cherry.

"We have had rather a rough voyage, though they were all good sailors. They are very strong little boys. George is a magnificent baby, though I didn't think he would have been."

"As a posthumous child, he will win my very special

love, Queenie."

"I'm sure he will, dear Papa. Now tell me about yourselves. You none of you look a day older. You have found a beautiful little home."

"It is larger than you would guess," said Gertrude

"-indeed amply large enough for us all-quite a roomy house."

"But not with me and my babies jammed into it."

They talked until Mary nearly fell asleep with her hand in her father's. Then Cherry took her to bed and Gertrude considered the situation with Sir George.

"She has been splendid," declared Gertrude. "Just what you would expect a Westover to be. She has your vitality and courage, Papa. She was always so independent. I feel that she will certainly want to start a home of her own. She spoke of lodgings."

"Abandon all idea of any such scheme, love," he answered firmly. "These matters may very safely be left in my hands. Is the child any less my daughter because her husband has been taken from her? The future can look after itself, as it always does—and naturally so, since it is in God's Hands. These things do not find us unprepared. I have made my arrangements and considered the possibilities of my income to meet the needful calls."

"I know it, Papa. It all works out splendidly on paper; and don't think I'm not with you heart and soul in your thoughts for precious Queenie and her little ones. But I'm sure she will want to help: you must not deny her that, or it would add to her unhappiness if you did. There are serious demands on your purse lying ahead for Wingate and so on."

"Gertrude," said Sir George, "you must face life in a larger and more sanguine spirit—you must indeed.

Recollect how Martha in the Gospel of-"

"I always sympathise so much with Martha, Papa. Perhaps I understand better than you can how Martha felt about things. You are very wise and you take large views, as a man, of course, does; but there are

plenty of little ways where you might, I think, help me. They would look nothing to you; yet they do mount up."

"Enumerate them, love," he answered. "I had

thought that in detail I rather excelled."

"You do, Papa; but—well, to give you an instance. I paid the washing book to-day."

He stared.

"Tchut! You don't want me to go into the details

of the washing book, Gertrude?"

"In one particular, yes," she said firmly. "You know, dear Papa, that for dinner every night you put on a clean dress shirt and collar, and take a clean pocket-handkerchief. Of course in India you would; but I have felt, over and over again, that it was really needless at home. You are a spotlessly clean feeder—if I may use the word, Papa—and every week seven immaculate shirts go to the laundress. And I'm perfectly certain, though she receives two shillings and fourpence a week for the shirts alone, that Mrs. Coombes never touches them."

Her father did not immediately reply. He regarded

Gertrude thoughtfully, then sighed.

"What do we say in India? 'The washerwoman knows who is poor and who is rich.' My first emotion was to be annoyed with you, love. At a first glance it seemed as though, in your passion for economy, even at cost of principle, you did not hesitate to strike at the roots of common decency. A clean shirt is such a rudimentary adjunct to civilised life. However, it may be as you say. In this, as in all things that are of the surface only, I am prepared to compromise. You mention two shillings and four pence. So be it. I will wear three shirts a week instead of seven, thus adding no mean sum to our reserves. You thus gain one and fourpence a week, Gertrude, and if you mul-

tiply that sum by fifty-two, you get, you get—well, a substantial annual addition to your privy purse."

"Thank you very much indeed, Papa. I will tell Johnny. I'm sure you won't regret it," said Gertrude

gratefully.

"I shall support the fact, but regret the principle," explained Sir George. "Had you suggested—let us say, two vegetables at luncheon instead of three—"

"A splendid idea, Papa!"

"Not now, with the children. Unlimited vegetables are vital to them. But had you proposed that in the past, or poultry once a week instead of twice, I should have seen the point; but the idea of striking at a gentleman's linen argues a certain—"

"You've promised, Papa."
Sir George smiled and quoted:

"The desire of the washerman is for the washerwoman. The desire of the washerwoman is for her donkey."

Cherry returned and the subject dropped.

"Johnny is delighted with the Indians," she said.
"They are all chattering away like monkeys, and Johnny is cooking queer things for them, and the dear children are sleeping so peacefully."

CHAPTER X

MARY BERTRAM inherited her father's temperament.

She rejoiced in him and he rejoiced in her.

"Dear Papa gets younger as he gets older," she said to Gertrude; and while the widow delighted in the fact, her sister admitted it, but with no pleasure. By nature Mary had a more sanguine spirit than Gertrude, a more vivid understanding than Cherry. Her sorrows had chilled her, but they had not aged her. They could not modify her abundant vitality and hopeful outlook upon life. She had loved her husband with great devotion and their union she declared to have been so perfect in its pure happiness that the memory would sustain her. Henceforth her days were dedicated to her children. She found her sisters kindly and affectionate; but her father understood her more closely. It was to him that she went, after reaction set in upon her return home; and it was he who helped her to regain her steadfast spirit and, presently, her old cheerful temper also.

He delighted in her companionship, for she was nearly always upon his side when occasions of differ-

ence arose.

The ayahs soon departed and the household settled down. Winter passed without event save that Mary's brother-in-law wrote and again offered to adopt her second son. She declared her very real gratitude but declined to accept the suggestion. She paid some visits and went to see her husband's relations; but there existed not much in common between her and the Bertram family.

With spring she began to grow light-hearted and, even while her conscience smote Mary, her vigorous and avid temperament rejoiced in life. To her children she was devoted, but young herself, and trained to regard Johnny as the last word in nursery wisdom, she left the little ones to the old counsellor.

When a year of mourning had passed, she modified her widow's weeds, and came out in the spring, "like a bunch of lovely lilac," as Cherry said. With her black she put off some years. She was now seven-and-

twenty, but looked no more than twenty-two.

Through this winter Sir George returned to his painting and produced many strange works intended to represent India. They contained mountains pointed with snow, vast tracts of darkness designed for forests, with a middle distance of palms and enormous trees and temples, elephants, and camels attended by natives in the foreground.

Cherry and Gertrude regarded their father's art as a useful accident which served to employ him happily in bad weather. The house was full of his pictures and they resembled each other closely. But Mary took an interest in these efforts, often sat with her father while he painted and urged him to attempt new subjects and try what he could do with Devon scenes of beauty.

"Everybody loves that drawing you did in your 'earlier manner' as you call it, Papa. Why shouldn't you try something in that style?" she asked on one

occasion.

"It was, I imagine, painted in my youth for your grandmother," he explained. "It must be very old now and I forget all the details. But I could not go back to that simple method again, Queenie."

"I believe you could," she declared. "I shall find you a lovely subject on Haldon Hills and implore you

to paint it, Papa."

"I am no artist," confessed Sir George. "Without my palm tree, or elephant, I should be lost, my love."

"But Haldon Hills and the old tower. You must

try that."

She reminded him of her wish when next he drove her out in his little vehicle, for now it happened that Mary was the daughter most often invited to accompany him. The others observed it, though he did not guess that he was showing preference; but the liking for Mary's company unconsciously asserted itself. He came home refreshed from a drive with her, while Gertrude more often left him a little cast down, and Cherry somewhat bored him. He had not been aware of these facts until his youngest daughter's return and was formerly well content with the elder women; but now he perceived that Mary was a stimulant, in that she provoked answering good spirits; while her elders acted rather as a sedative.

"My Gertrude has an elderly mind," he once confessed to Miss Protheroe. "She sees life steadily, but in tints that may be described as somewhat neutral, tending even to the sombre. The light she casts is clear, but inclined to be a little cold in quality. Now my Queenie, despite sufferings and sorrows, of which Gertrude can happily have no idea whatever, yet still reveals an instinct toward youth and sunshine."

"A beautiful, hopeful nature, like your own, Sir

George," answered the lady.

His garden and his friends entirely occupied the old Indian when spring returned. He stood beside William Fry on a day in May and watched him planting out a bed of seedling chilis. The chili, red or green, was a fiery condiment that Sir George and Johnny both loved. They vied with each other in admiration for these fierce red peppers.

"Given a good summer, Fry, we shall produce an abundant harvest," he said. "Not only may we have them for present use, but enough to store. I design larger facilities for storing everything next autumn. Apples and pears, for example."

"They did ought to be hoarded more clever." admitted the gardener. "If us had a store-house and I kept the key of un, they would go a darned sight farther than what they do do-likewise the potatoes and

onions."

"We must accept the fruits of the earth in their season, William, and remember that no good things last for ever."

"They don't—that's the difference between them and bad things," answered Fry.

Sir George perceived that his friend was cast down. "You are under a cloud this morning, Fry."

The old man rose, spat and stuck out his fist.

"By this 'and, Sir George, I'm beggared to know what to do about my boy. He's getting too much for a widow-man like me."

"Richard? He always appears busy when I see

him in the garden."

"I dare say, Sir George, for the reason that he sees you a good bit afore ever you see him. He stands to work in working hours, but he's got bad friends and loose morals. He's sixteen now, and he don't like me. and he's as hard as a flint."

"Does he go to church?"

"Not a chance. Sir George. Of a Sunday he gets up on Haldon with a lot of other young scamps and plays pitch and toss, or else takes a beastly young girl out for a walk."

"Pitch and toss is actionable. William. If the police found him gambling in that way they might proceed

against him.'

"The police don't watch Haldon, your honour. And I'm feared of my life about it. He didn't ought to be ashore. I hoped he'd make a gardener, but now I fear he's the sort ought to be drove to sea and have

a boatswain's mate over him."

"Do not allow these difficulties to daunt you, Fry," advised his master. "I myself have a son, who will soon return to me for a short season, and I may tell you in confidence that when he was Richard's age he often gave me moments of uneasiness. In matters of money the young have a false outlook, born of inexperience. We, who have earned our living, know the value of money; young fellows do not. The instinct to gamble is one of the commonest weeds in human nature. The thought of getting something for nothing always wins an instant response from the heart of man—young and old alike. Even you and I, if we were tempted with great promise for modest outlay, might think twice before we turned our backs upon the project. Pitch and toss I do not take seriously, though it should be stopped at once, because it might lead to graver things. My son showed an inclination to become an adventurer in stocks and shares, which is practically the same thing; but I spoke with him and made it clear that he would win no support from me. As for an abandoned girl, at which you hint, no Westover would sink to anything of that sort, and I hope no Frv would."

William nodded.

"All to the good, Sir George, and I wouldn't say the girl was abandoned in a manner of speaking; but 'tis too soon for Richard to begin keeping company. And so he'd better abandon she in my opinion. And I haven't got the speech like you. Words flow out of you like feathers off a goose, Sir George; and if you'd be so good as to speak to Dick, I dare say as he might

be saved. And, failing that, I'll try my bestest to drive him to sea."

"I will speak to him—I will speak to him and endeavour to steady him down," promised Sir George. "And the matter of church-going is vital. That is the most serious thing you have against him, William. No man or woman who serves me must evade the House of God on the Sabbath. You are to blame there, Fry. You should have trained him to look upon religious exercises as a part of life. Does he say his prayers?"

"He did-till his mother died. I'd lay my life he

don't now."

"At five o'clock this afternoon I shall await him in

my study, William. And see that he is there."

The interview was prolonged, but Sir George secured promises of amendment. He questioned the youth, who was built on his father's large pattern, found him civil and not unintelligent, made him rehearse the Lord's Prayer, ascertained that he knew it and won from him a faithful promise that he would go to church in future and pray daily.

"And with respect to a certain girl, Richard," concluded Sir George, "hold out no false promises. At present you have your way to make and your wages to earn. In any case you are far too young to contemplate marriage, and as a Christian youth would not, I should imagine, contemplate anything else. You have my sympathy and understanding in that matter. The companionship of the other sex is entirely commendable, seemly and desirable. But let it be conducted in a self-respecting way so that females may applaud you. Always be considerate, tender and magnanimous, Richard, in your dealings with the weaker vessel. Your father fears that the sea is the only place for you, to learn discipline and manhood in that harsh school; but I have prevailed with him to give you another

chance ashore in my employment, and I hope and believe—I believe, Richard, that you will not prove my advice was mistaken."

"I'm all right, your honour," declared the boy. "I'm only young—that's what's the matter. My father forgets he was young hisself; and he was a proper dog, too, for I've heard my aunt tell him so to his face."

Sir George's eves twinkled.

"Well, go your way and order your life as becomes you, Richard. I have not forgotten in the least what it is to be young, and though I am not aware that anybody ever had occasion to call me 'a proper dog,' still the quality of 'doggishness' may often be accompanied by excellent instincts. And I do think that, in your case, youth will prove your only fault. Keep young while you may; and in order to keep young, keep busy and hard working and steady. That was my rule of life and I know none better."

He beamed youthfully upon Richard and closed the

interview.

Not a month later the Westovers were greeting the son and heir, and Wingate joined his family for a

period of half a year before he left England.

The young man was tall, well knit and muscular. He resembled his father in certain particulars, but lacked the elder's over-powering energy save when concerned with matters of pleasure. He possessed ambition, but it was of a very modest quality and held no altruistic inspiration. He was vain of his handsome face, fond of feminine society and of a temperament very indolent. He wore light-coloured whiskers and a moustache. His hair was rather long and very carefully kept; his blue eyes resembled his father's. His clothes were in the fashion of the time, and he best liked a rather large check pattern for his peg-top

trousers and cut-away coats; while his waistcoats and ties commanded much of his thought. In these matters his taste inclined to the garish. He carried a cane mounted in silver and wore a small bowler hat with

a turned-up brim.

Sir George found much to chasten in his son. They had not met for two years, and it was apparent that city life provoked to laxity of manners and a loud taste in dress that Wingate's father gravely deplored. The "pioneer," as Sir George chose now to call him, was of an amiable temper and entertained the greatest affection for his family. He loved all manner of pleasure and brightened the summer greatly for Cherry and Mary. He and his youngest sister had always been the closest companions and, since she was a married woman, he confided to Mary certain adventures that he denied to the others. He had been several times in love it seemed, but was now once more fancy free with various experiences completed.

His outfit for Africa interested him much, and in this matter he swiftly found his father to be amenable enough. Gertrude proved the chilling factor and Wingate was careful not to mention his varied requirements before her. With his father in private, however, he did so, and Sir George, with the vaguest ideas of what the circumstances really demanded, took a sentimental view, imagined his son as facing difficulty and danger in a virgin country infested by dangerous savages and wild beasts, and yielded to the demand for an expensive sporting rifle for great game, a revolver

of latest pattern and many other needless things.

Sir George perhaps went further than he might by reason of certain matters connected with his conscience. He found himself very disappointed with Wingate, but was shrewd with himself and probed the sources of his disappointment very honestly. He recognised that superficial evidences of taste he deplored were of the surface alone and insignificant; but the real cause of his regret he found to lie in the fact that Wingate, in the splendid strength of youth, reflected to him, as in a glass, an image of his own superabundant vigour and pleasant personality when he himself had been a young man. To his pained astonishment he found himself a little jealous of his son, envious of his powers and possibilities. He made this discovery curiously. It resulted from Wingate's nocturnal activities, and Sir George found that, at the hour of evening prayer, the young man was invariably absent from home upon his own affairs.

He directed Wingate to keep better hours and subscribe more considerately to the rules of the house. He suspected Mary of collusion and feared that she often stopped up to admit her brother, when the rest of the house slumbered. These irregularities worried him and it was then, on considering the problem, he faced the unpleasant revelation that an element of very undignified envy entered largely into his views of what

became Wingate.

Instantly he condemned himself, reminded himself that his son would soon be facing the stern life of a pioneer, and that these few months in the bosom of his family were the last to be so spent for many years. He asked himself what he feared; what he mistrusted. Wingate was a Westover, and it followed in Sir George's opinion that he would sink to no action unworthy of his race. He was, moreover, a man, not a boy, and could not be expected to conform to a rule of conduct proper in a house full of women. Remorse touched Sir George; he regretted one or two rather acid scenes between himself and Wingate; he ceased to expostulate at certain trifles and raised no further inquiries at to what his son did with himself after din-

ner. He lightened and modified his regulations for all concerned. He sometimes, on moonlit, summer nights, accompanied his family for a stroll after the last meal was eaten. And, as a factor of this discovery of his own weakness, came the generosity which denied Wingate none of the material he desired for South Africa. Nothing was at any time easier than to provoke generosity in Sir George. He found himself happier for this large attitude and argued with Gertrude, from whose eyes the growing outfit for the pioneer could not be concealed.

Mary insisted on paying her own expenses and those of her children. Her widow's pension enabled her to do so; but it was only when she told her father she would leave him if he denied her, that he yielded. Thereupon he went to the other extreme and proved, in secret to Gertrude, that under these circumstances, the advent of his widowed child and her family distinctly tended to increase the general comfort.

"If you could only see the new situation in its real implications, my Gerty," he said, "you would have no difficulty in understanding, as I do, that our precious Queenie relieves the strain for us all, and makes it possible for me to send Wingate to his task better equipped than I had hoped possible at one time. Thus, rightly viewed, we see how all things work together

for good."

"Are you paying the bills for Wingate's things, or

letting them run?" she asked.

"One doesn'e pay tradesmen's accounts before they are delivered, my love. The bills for these impedimenta will reach me, no doubt, at Michaelmas, and find me in a position to liquidate them."

Wingate proved fruitful of plans for picnics and other summer pleasures. He loved a festa and was always able to enlist the good services of his sisters. Many young people were in Dawmouth at the time of the summer holidays; but only Mary knew that a certain Nelly Smith, a schoolmistress of obscure origin, was deeply agitating Wingate. He had met her by chance upon the beach, scraped acquaintance over a dead sea-gull and found his heart stirred from that moment.

Miss Smith it seemed was beautiful, distinguished, and of refined character. She laboured in a London suburb, condemned by poverty to a life altogether distasteful and absurd in connection with such a spirit. Wingate had never seen any woman to equal her in delicacy of mind. Moreover she was an orphanpractically alone in the world. No family complications could therefore arise. An extraordinary fact appeared in the way they thought alike. She shared his fearless outlook on existence, and hoped some day. if ever in a position to do so, that she might travel round the world. He had, of course, done nothing that could lead the girl to suppose that he was anything more than a holiday friend; but she showed amazing sympathy and understanding, and applauded his intention to face reality in the wilds and cast away the trammels of an artificial and hollow existence. She had said that to become a pioneer's wife and support such a man would be a proud destiny for any woman.

These things, in midnight conversations, Wingate confided to Mary. Since their father ceased to inquire concerning the young man's movements and was content, so long as he always appeared at morning prayer before breakfast, Wingate had taken to very late hours; and Mary it was who generally let him in, through the window of her bedroom, situated upon the ground floor. Thus a noise, which opening and unbolting of the front door must have made, was escaped.

These sounds had been proved to awaken Sir George, who was an exceedingly light sleeper. He had, on subsequent mornings, raised questions, as to time, not

convenient to answer truly.

Wingate found his sister's window of considerable value now, and he often sat on her bed, took off his boots, and related his adventures before himself retiring. Thus she learned all she knew of Nelly Smith. and indeed more than he knew, for Mary possessed a quick brain and found no difficulty in judging how the young schoolmistress might regard her brother.

"I beg and pray you to give her up, Win," she urged. "It's all wild nonsense. You're just starting your real career and your whole life depends upon it. To go and handicap yourself with an engagement to an utterly unknown girl would be madness. You ought not to dream of marrying for years and years—until you've made your fortune."

"My dear child," he said, "a woman may be a man's fortune. How do I know that Nelly would not be a million times more to me than all the diamonds in Africa?"

She sighed.

"That's just a silly thing, dear Papa would say.

Do be sane, Win."

"I'm sane enough. Love—the real article—makes you highly intelligent. Look at it practically. Imagine she consented to be my wife. Well, she accompanies me to South Africa. I settle her in at Cape Town, or Durban, or somewhere, and so I have a permanent base. Then I go forward to my work, just as I am going to do, with the immense advantage of a home and a faithful, loving wife in it. I go and come with the tremendous incentive to succeed, represented by Nelly in the background."

"Wingate," she answered, "you know—you know—this is absolute nonsense. You're amusing yourself with a ridiculous idea, and you would be the first to protest if any other man came to you with such a suggestion."

"I shouldn't. Did you see her on the front this

morning after you and Cherry had bathed?"

"Yes, I did see her. I had an opportunity to get a good look at her."

"And isn't she beautiful?"

"No, Win, she is not. She is very attractive, and she's got one of those mouths that, for some reason, men always adore; just as you've got a mouth that, for some reason, women always adore. She's sly."

"There you're utterly wrong," he said. "That's just the last thing she is. There never was such a frank girl on earth—too frank if anything. She couldn't do, or think, anything sly. Her nobility of character—"

"Oh, go to bed," said Mary, "and drop her. I'm a great deal disappointed in you, Win. You always seemed so manly to me before I married. I believe

you're horribly feeble really."

He laughed and left her, but these conversations were repeated, and Mary, beginning to be alarmed, debated with herself if Gertrude might be trusted to help. She also wondered whether it would be possible to meet Miss Nelly Smith herself and learn more concerning her. Such a course might be dangerous; but danger was not likely to deter Mary. Her brother's welfare appeared to be threatened; yet intervention she suspected would do more harm than good. These shadowy affections had happened so often to Wingate and passed again, leaving him unmarked. She knew he was a fascinating young man, but, returning to him after her own experiences of life and enlarged acquaint-

ance with his sex, perceived that he had shrunk by many sizes from her girlish estimate. He was, she feared, a very slight personality, with little to commend him but his good temper, high spirits and handsome face.

CHAPTER XI

"It is high time," said Sir George, "that Wingate went to man's work."

He spoke to Gertrude, where they stood together in the drawing-room awaiting their guests. For the Westovers were giving another dinner-party. They had accepted invitations to several, and it was now their turn to entertain. But to this festivity, at the last moment, Wingate had refused to come. It was, he declared, vitally necessary to be in London on the date determined. He must see a friend, who would travel to Africa with him. A young man of good family destined, so Wingate told his father, to be of utmost use to him in the future. The date of this important meeting had not been fixed until the invitations for Sir George's dinner-party were accepted; but the old man was incapable of suspecting his son, though all three of his daughters did so.

"He is very inconsiderate," declared Gertrude, "and very idle and lazy. I personally begged him to stop to-day, but I carry no weight with Wingate as you

know."

"I have been advising him to go into the yeomanry," said Mary. "He has four months yet before he sails, and if he joined that, it would occupy him, and he would be doing something useful."

"He would look so nice in the black uniform with

silver buttons and so on," said Cherry.

"Absurd," declared Gertrude. "The uniform alone would cost I don't know what; and there's the horse. As an officer he would want a horse."

"He'd look beautiful on a horse," said Cherry.

"I have endeavoured, without success, to interest him in the garden," explained Sir George, "and I have invited him to go out to Langford Cliff, where they tell me at low tide remarkable prawns may be secured. These Johnny would turn into a curry worth talking about; but I can win no intelligent interest of any sort from Wingate. I note that during his revolver practice in the garden he has done considerable damage to the lesser auracaria, against which he planted his target."

The problem of Wingate was abandoned, for guests began to arrive, and Miss Protheroe brought with her a visitor—a widowed friend with grey hair, but a remarkably young face and great vivacity of manner. The Hon. Mrs. Caterham's husband had been a teaplanter in Ceylon. She had, it seemed, married beneath her for love, and was herself the daughter of a peer. Sir George found that he had known her father in India, but not her deceased husband. was familiar with the East and obviously roused the greatest enthusiasm in her host. The dinner followed upon the usual lines and was only remarkable for the unusual celerity with which the gentlemen joined the ladies. In the drawing-room Sir George once more drifted to Mrs. Caterham, after spending but a comparatively brief time with the other women. Immense animation characterised their discourse, for the lady loved India and won obvious pleasure from the old man's reminiscences and recollections. He knew Ceylon well, and they found various common acquaintance from the past concerning whom each could tell the other something.

He expatiated on their visitor when the entertainment was ended, and declared that never for many years had he encountered a gentlewoman of such

humour, graciousness and charm.

"You dazzled each other, Papa," said Mary. "I

believe it was a case of love at first sight."

He laughed and pinched the girl's cheek, while Gertrude reproved such flippancy. But when she and Cherry brushed each other's hair that night on retiring, Gertrude confessed that the extraordinary warmth of the friendship suddenly created between her father and the stranger had not escaped her notice.

"He is always gallant and wonderfully attentive to women, whether they happen to be good-looking or no," she said; "but he went out of his way with Mrs.

Caterham."

"And she—she did take to Papa so," declared Cherry. "He always likes the thin, graceful ones. And when she sparkled, she looked so young. And Papa always looks so young by lamplight."

"Is she stopping long with Miss Protheroe?"

"I believe not. She's paying a round of visits and going on to Cornwall. Her people live in Cornwall. The present Lord St. Clare's her brother."

"Well, she gave dear Papa great pleasure," admitted

Gertrude.

"And he gave her great pleasure. She's a very nice woman, Gerty, and has distinction I thought."

"Yes, a high-minded woman."

"I believe Mary was right in a way. I believe they did dazzle each other."

"My dear child, men of seventy-six don't dazzle women."

"But Papa—it's utterly absurd to think he's even seventy. He's so upright, so active, and his voice isn't a bit an old man's voice."

"He's very wonderful; but I've noticed one thing. Wingate's ageing him. We don't—women never do; but Wingate does. It may seem unkind to say so, but Wingate casts him down."

"Win's such a selfish pig. He won't throw himself

into Papa's interests."

"It isn't that. It's because Papa can't throw himself into Wingate's interests. In a way Papa's jealous of Wingate."

"Gertrude! How ridiculous!"

"Very ridiculous indeed. True things are often ridiculous."

"You're inventing this, Gerty. You do invent things you know."

Gertrude swept a brush over Cherry's abundant and

glossy hair.

"When I was at school," she said, "I had to learn German—or try to learn it. I never got far; but we were made to study Schiller and Goethe—great German poets. And Goethe's masterpiece is called 'Faust.' And, looking back I see a sort of weird likeness between Faust and Papa. Faust, when he is old and wise, has a horrid idea that it would be nice to regain his youth, and the Devil—Mephistopheles—helps him to do so, on certain conditions involving his eternal perdition. Then Faust grows young and beautiful, and dreadful things happen about a girl called Marguerite. But what I mean is that Papa often feels, I believe, that it would be nice if he was young again."

"It's not natural, Gerty! Papa with his old-world

dignity."

"Lots of people would be delighted to exchange their old-world dignity for young-world pleasures and powers. I've met one or two old women—quite nice women, too—who actually said so."

"Well, that can't happen to Papa," declared Cherry.

"When Win goes, he'll be happier no doubt."

Then she laughed.

"What an idea-Papa married again."

"I don't find the thought in the least amusing," said Gertrude. "The possibility is rather horrible if you ask me. Too horrible to contemplate. It argues a sort of disrespect of Papa to imagine such an outrageous thing."

"Well, you thought of it first."

"Indeed I did not. Papa is emotional and always quick to respond to a well-bred woman; but he has a keen sense of humour. You remember what he said when his old friend, General Featherstone, married again at seventy."

"Yes: but General Featherstone married almost a girl. She was not quite thirty, I believe. I don't think age has much to do with it."

"I'll say 'good night,' Cherry. Don't let us talk

about this again. It is more than painful."

They parted, and the next day Cherry, feeling the subject must never be re-opened in her elder sister's ears, endeavoured to learn what Mary thought about it. Her views were more spacious than Gertrude's. She was much amused and quite understood the instinct that delighted old women when in the company of Sir George.

"And why shouldn't he have women friends?" she "Why shouldn't he even marry again if he

likes?"

Cherry felt a guilty pleasure in agreeing with the widow. At the same time she pointed out that any such thing must create an absolute upheaval in the family.

"I'm sure Gertrude would never stand it. She'd goshe'd leave Papa. That's rather an awful thought, Mary, after all these years that Gertrude has devoted to him."

"It won't happen of course. Papa's the sanest man under his little habits and prejudices. I'm only saying that, if he did, the world wouldn't come to an end."

"I believe Gertrude's world would."

"Oh dear no. In six months she might be saying it was a blessing. A wife has far more authority than a daughter. A wife, with a good heart and a fair knowledge of arithmetic, might be a very grand thing for Papa—especially if she had a little money."

"Nobody with any money would marry an old man," declared Cherry; but Mary could cite cases where the

aged had shared life for companionship.

"I believe they agree to live and band together sometimes," she said, "just to support themselves against the pressure of the middle-aged. The young don't affect them much; but the middle-aged do frighten the old very often. The middle-aged get impatient and hard and callous. They see their own chances of happiness and comfort slipping away, and if the old stand between them and their chances, then they don't like it. And then the really old, if they've got enough sense left, feel their room would be more precious than their company. And it hurts them."
"How sad," sighed Cherry. "But I'm sure, if he

lived to be a hundred, Papa would never feel he was

in anybody's way."

"Because he never would be," said Mary. "He's

far too much of a dear to be in anybody's way."

Mary Bertram herself had a personal problem to face at this moment. Not until eighteen months after her husband's death did she receive an offer of marriage; and then it came from the first and dearest of Charles Bertram's friends. Colonel Forrester wrote from India and invited her to become his wife.

She cared for Harold Forrester very deeply. He was a close link with the dead; he had been magically sympathetic in her sorrow; he had left no stone unturned to ensure her comfort and had showed tenderest consideration until she left the theatre of her brief married life; and now he wrote to say what an unspeakable privilege it would be to him if she allowed him to wed her and be a father to his dead friend's sons.

Mary was secretly moved by this very unexpected proposal; but she belonged to an age and order now vanished away and considered that even to mention the matter to her father under the circumstances would be a breach of confidence. Nor was it necessary, for her decision, to remain a widow, could not be altered. She held herself as wedded once and for ever, and the thought of another husband repelled her. Her instincts made against it. She knew such a step to be seemly and usual; but for her it presented an impossibility. If the need to marry again had been forced upon her. Mary told herself that she would sooner have united with the kindly colonel than any man of her acquaintance; but no such necessity could exist in the nature of things. She was free, and she held that her duty to her children and her steadfast love of a dead husband alike pointed to a lifetime of widowhood. Moreover her own inclinations must have determined her even though no children existed. She had no mind to wed again.

The incident passed unknown to her family. She did not even mention it to Wingate, her confidant and

dearest friend at this time.

He had abandoned Nelly Smith, and when the day arrived for her to return to her scholastic duties, and she found it necessary to ask Wingate his intentions, something about the way the young woman did it created a revulsion of feeling in the mind of this unstable youth.

He related the incident under midnight secrecy to

Marv.

"I felt at that moment," declared Wingate, "that there was a side to Nelly I had not seen—a side which she had rather gone out of her way to hide. I told her that my intentions were strictly honourable anyway, and she said that she could look after that all right, but that wasn't the point. From that moment I felt a sort of warning to cool off."

"You ought to have felt the warning much sooner."

said his sister.

"At any rate I felt it then, and began to see that there really is a deuce of a lot in sticking to your own class and so on. I told her that she had succeeded in winning my sincerest affection and admiration, and that I should often think of her and remember her delightful company; but that a pioneer must not allow himself to create ties and all that sort of rot. She listened, and then asked me if I did not consider myself in honour engaged to marry her. And, of course, that brought me up with a round turn. Because I'd never suggested anything of the sort."

"You're positive you never did, Win?"

"Positive, for the very good reason that, if I had, she'd have accepted me instantly, and insisted on becoming a pioneeress herself. If I'd been engaged she certainly would not have let me go to Africa without her. She's that sort. So, when she asked this question, I saw, of course, that she wasn't at all the kind of girl I had imagined and exalted into a sort of angel. Far from it in fact. So I hardened."

"How did you harden? It's not a process you'd

excel at."

"Yes, I did. I can be as hard as anybody when people go too far and upset my convenience. I told her my honour was perfectly safe in my own keeping—the same as hers—and that she had shocked me a good deal by mentioning the subject. I said I was most

certainly not engaged to her, and I let her down by saying I never meant to marry anybody, but live a lonely and dangerous life that no woman could share. Then she cried, and after she'd cried for about ten minutes, she showed the cloven hoof, and told me to go—well, to hell. Rather an eye-opener, eh? She'd hid her real self completely, and was just amusing herself and letting me entertain her and spend a dickens of a lot of money and so on—and common as they make them all the time."

"Has she gone?"

"She went yesterday. I saw her off. She was quite quiet. I've got her direction, but I shan't write to her."

"On no account write to her, Win."

"I'm not going to. It's rather a jar, but a merciful escape, Queenie."

"Do let it be a lesson not to make a fool of yourself

with girls again."

A week afterwards a painful affair involving Sir George and his son occurred; but concerning this the women of the family never knew. Mrs. Caterham accompanied Miss Protheroe when they called at Belmont Lodge after the dinner-party, and Sir George with his daughters brought them into the garden, that they might see a bed of brilliant cannas which the old man had raised from seed. Then the party broke up for a few minutes and Mrs. Caterham and he found themselves alone in an orchard house. He took the opportunity to suggest that she should accompany him for a little drive in his pony carriage, and she, finding him still much to her taste, agreed to do so. An instinct made Sir George keep this enterprise private, though whether for the reason that he would win more pleasure from it under those circumstances, or from suspicion that his purpose might not please Gertrude. he hardly stayed to examine. But the drive was planned and he undertook to wait on the widow at Miss Protheroe's villa upon the day after next. Mrs. Caterham was leaving Dawmouth upon the following Monday, and he declared her most generous to spare him some hours of the little remaining time at her disposal.

"I think, my loves," he said, "that I will not ask

one of you to accompany me this afternoon."

He gave no explanation, but merely conveyed his unusual determination, and they, with customary regard for good taste in all delicate matters, accepted his statement and made no effort to inquire a reason. He took Richard as "tiger," and drove the stout pony solemnly away; while when he had gone, his daughters felt no further need for reticence and discussed the mystery. To Gertrude the problem proved insoluble,

"Papa never cares for his own company when he drives out," she said, "and I have not noticed anything on his mind—at least nothing disagreeable. One always knows."

Cherry removed a bread-crumb from Gertrude's breast, where they stood on the front steps after Sir

George's departure.

"Perhaps he's going to give Richard another talking to, and doesn't want one of us to hear," she suggested.

"Oh, no, he wouldn't choose a drive for that,"

replied the elder.

"There is something on his mind," declared Mary, "but it isn't unpleasant. It's pleasant. I believe he's going to see somebody we don't know!"

"Queenie! How can you?" cried Cherry. Gertrude also resented the suggestion.

"Papa, I think, knows nobody that we do not," she said. "It is rather degrading in a way, Mary, to

suggest that he has friends that he would not wish to

bring to his own house."

"Not a bit," replied the widow. "I know so much more about men than you girls. And that makes me much older and wiser. I don't say it is so, and I don't say Papa's not the most punctilious person and proud and particular to a degree. But all men know people they wouldn't like their women folk to know. It's a way they've got. It doesn't mean anything. There's a side of them that likes to expand in a sort of genial atmosphere they seldom find at home. I discovered that in India."

"The climate perhaps," ventured Cherry.

"Not at all. It's rather difficult to explain. All men, you see, like to be heroes sometimes; and it's ever so much easier to be a hero among—well, among your social inferiors, if you understand me, than in your own class."

"I'm glad I don't understand you, Mary," replied her eldest sister with rather tart accents. "We have shed many tears for your sorrows and for dear Charles; but I'm bound to say that I don't think India

has added to your own refinement."

"I don't expect it has," admitted Mary; "but don't

be cross. I'm only offering a theory of Papa."

"That Papa, who shines among his equals, should condescend to seek—you must know the idea's indelicate and also ridiculous."

"Where do you suggest he's gone, Queenie?" asked

Cherry.

"I don't suggest he's gone anywhere. Perhaps only gone to have a quiet think. He always thinks better in the open air. But he generally does all his thinking in the mornings."

"I have very little doubt he'll tell us anything there is to tell when he comes home," prophesied Gertrude;

then she entered the house to proceed with Wingate's packing; while the others went to play with Mary's children on the lawn.

Meantime Sir George had picked up Mrs. Caterham, who was waiting for him in an attractive jacket and bonnet. She opened a pretty parasol after they had driven off and the old man decreed that a drive upon Haldon Hills would be desirable.

"Unless, indeed, you deem the brisker upland air

not agreeable," he said.

But Mrs. Caterham approved of the brisk upland air, and presently the pony steadily faced the steep lane that ascended to the heath, while Sir George occasionally stroked its back gently with the whip-lash. He had directed Richard to dismount and walk, to save the steed exertion, and the youth now strolled onward in a leisurely manner fifty yards behind the carriage, occupying himself in the innocent pastime of eating wild strawberries from the hedge.

And then the undesirable thing happened. Sir George was expatiating generally on Indian themes. when, from a gate out of the woods, there suddenly emerged Wingate Westover and a young woman. The place was lonely, and his own voice had hidden the dull sounds of the approaching vehicle from him. Thus within ten yards he confronted his parent—at a moment when, as Mary would have put it, the pioneer was most certainly expanding in an atmosphere he did not find at home.

"Tchut!" said Sir George, but added nothing to the exclamation.

Wingate held on, since there was no opportunity to do otherwise. He took off his hat as he passed the carriage, but did not stop, while Sir George, whose sight was still exceedingly clear, perceived that his son walked with a cottage girl. He lifted his whip-hand an inch or two and kept his eyes on the pony's ears, while Mrs. Caterham, who knew Wingate by sight, pretended, with admirable tact, to be stricken blind.

They were talking of Indian sayings at the time, and Sir George, who often in conversation made use of them, declared that his old servant, Miss Johnston, was rich in the homely proverbs of the natives; but after this unfortunate incident, the old man's enthusiasm for native wit against Brahman, Raiput and Baidva cooled down: the laughter died out of his eyes; it was only with an effort he could pursue the conversation. He spoke mechanically, while he reflected that Wingate had seen him and he had seen Wingate. Had the wretched youth remained within the woods for another two minutes, the stupid rencontre must have been avoided. Sir George was not concerned for himself; but to discover Wingate thus engaged, and to know that Richard and Mrs. Caterham had done the like, caused him deep disgust. Even in the slough of his own discomfort, however, he could admire the lady's tactful attitude.

"A Chaube," he told her, "is a Brahman title. They say that when a Chaube dies, he becomes a monkey, and when a monkey dies, it becomes a Chaube. Then they never weary of scorning a Brahman. 'He chants the Divine Song,' say the people, 'but sins himself.'"

"A thing not peculiar to Brahmans," declared Mrs.

Caterham.

"No, no; there is much hypocrisy in the world." "What do you understand by a Bhāt?" she asked.

"A Bhāt," he told her, "is a Bard, a sort of man of letters in a humble way—a more or less learned person. They, too, are laughed at. They say of a Bhāt that he went into business and turned his hundred rupees into thirty."

She laughed.

"Again an experience not peculiar to Bhāts," she said. "My dear husband did the same."

"Indeed no. We are told that money breeds money;

I have never found that happen to mine."

"Nor I-quite the contrary."

"There are excellent sayings against the Rajputs also," he continued, while his emotions calmed a little. "The Rajputs, as you know, are warriors and petty landowners. They hold the Rajput is only tolerable in his own home, or in his grave, and at a Rajput wedding festival, they say there is plenty of drumming and very little dinner."

At the top of the hill they rested the pony and admired the view. Mrs. Caterham asked him about his art and he begged her to accept a water-colour

drawing of the Taj Mahal.

"I should be very proud indeed to do so, Sir George," she replied. "It will be a memento of some most

agreeable hours."

In due course the drive of pleasure terminated, and Sir George brought his new acquaintance back again to her friend's house. Declining an invitation to tea, he left her, promised that he would not forget the picture, and went his way. He handed the reins to Richard on reaching home and presently retreated to his study. An instinct turned him to serious things. He sighed, reflected with a very melancholy expression upon his face, wondered if Wingate had returned, listened at the door for his voice, failed to hear it, and then brought out his Bibles.

He had, as it were, retreated into sanctuary when Mary appeared to tell him Gertrude had made the

tea.

"I am studying, love, and shall want nothing until my dinner," he said.

"Let me bring you a cup, Papa."

"No. Queenie, I thank you. Only see that I am not disturbed."

She looked at the Testaments, spread open in a row, and went her way. But Sir George did not pursue the endless intricacies of collation. He sat quite still for an hour and a half debating the subject of Win-

gate, and sighing repeatedly.

"Would that it had been an unreal vision," he said to himself. For a moment his incurable optimism suggested that it might have been. Mrs. Caterham had certainly given no sign that she had observed anything. But he was not subject to hallucinations. He faced his duty and considered what that might exactly demand from him. And what was Wingate thinking meanwhile? Would it be possible for Wingate to imagine that his father, too, had committed an indiscretion? "An instinct of self-preservation may incline him to do so," reflected Sir George.

He recollected the near departure of Wingate as a ray of light in the gloom. But there remained ample time to do his duty to his son. "There is always time

to do one's duty," he thought.

CHAPTER XII

THE Castle Mail Packet Company's vessels left England from Dartmouth for the Cape, and thither Sir George and Mary presently accompanied Wingate

Westover, when the day of departure arrived.

The old man had reproved his son and found that Wingate's meeting with the girl was quite accidental. The pioneer, strolling through the woods, fell in with her picking up Spanish chestnuts, where a fine harvest was now scattered upon the earth. With his usual sociability, he assisted the search and they happened to leave the woods together.

Sir George found himself unable entirely to accept

this story.

"I, too, am a sinful man," he replied, "and I never chasten any fellow-creature, Wingate, without recollecting very vividly my own indiscretions of past days. It is a salutary though painful fact, that if I am called to judge or reprove, my own vanished errors invariably return most vividly to my recollection at that moment. The result has been that, in my official career, I won the character of a lenient judge."

"My dear Dad, you're not a sinful man at all," declared Wingate, "and you've been the best father a son ever had. And I'm going out to get you sacks full of gold and diamonds; but nothing I can get you will

ever be worthy of you."

They parted amiably and Sir George's eyes shone as the ship crept out between the wooded harbour heads and set her course. Mary also felt a little moved.

"I do hope dear old Win will like Africa and be a success there," she said. "He's such a big-hearted,

trustful boy."

"Those of trustful temperament," said Sir George, blowing his nose and regarding the ship, "face danger, Queenie, unless they know where to trust. God is the only Being to help trustful people in this world: nobody else is ever inclined to do so."

"His friend looked a young man of character."
"Did he? I'm glad. I failed to observe him."

"Win felt parting with you, Papa, though he tried not to show it. He told me that you'd given him fifty pounds. At least he tried to tell me. But——"

"Don't breathe a word of it at home, my love.

Forget it, please."
"I will, Papa."

He speculated on the length of years that must

separate him from his son.

"I suspect a decade will pass before I hold the boy's hand once more in mine," he said; and Mary marvelled at his absolute indifference to another possibility.

"I believe you don't regard time as a real thing at

all, Papa," she said.

"I have acquired the Oriental contempt for it," he answered. "Time never weighed heavily on me; and I will tell you why. My habit is to look forward, and I believe that to be a good habit. Those who look back, or dwell over-much in the present, are they who find time heavy on their hands; but if you look ahead, count future possibilities and keep before your eyes the Goal, where time is not, then it weighs as light as thistledown. In my experience the past is always disappointing, by reason of our human weakness, that has spoiled it and failed to put it to the best purpose; but hope of amendment and longing to grow more worthy—for these ambitions we must look for-

ward. Time only lies heavily on my shoulders when I look back and count my many errors of judgment and temper; but there is always the future."

Sir George appeared to be justified in his faith, for on the departure of Wingate, after the first sense of loss had faded, he grew visibly younger. His health was excellent, his energy unbounded.

"He seems to eat less and be capable of more activity every day of his life," said Admiral Ryecroft to Gertrude. "He actually looks younger too. A mysterious and wonderful man. I wish I knew the secret. I believe he's got a new liver-but where did he get it?"

The excitement of an outrage in his garden, however, came as a cloud upon the old Indian's energies, and he did an unwise thing in the pardonable heat of an indignant moment. The offender was Richard Fry and the sufferer, small Charles, Mary's eldest son. He and his brother were hearty, sturdy little boys and loved best the kitchen-garden, where they played, generally under the eye of William Fry, who loved children. He made them a bed of sea sand in a sunny corner, and there they spent many hours together. Charles was an imaginative child and mixed invention and laughter with his games; while his little brother, Wilford, like an unconscious creature—kitten or foxcub-played steadily with quiet enjoyment, but in an expressionless fashion. He never laughed and seldom smiled, yet concentrated on the matter in hand after a manner foreign to his more volatile brother.

It was when roaming for fresh fields that Charles met Richard picking the scarlet and green fruit off the chili bed, and on inquiring what they were, Dick, in a thoughtless moment, allowed the child to help himself and grinned to see the sequel. The small white teeth of Charles were soon crushing into a scarlet and shining capsule of liquid fire, and a few moments later his tender mouth suffered the sharpest agonies that he had known. He stared, spat, and then began to dance and scream with pain. At this moment, returning from a walk, Sir George came upon the pair of them and observed in a moment what had happened. The infant appeared to be suffocating and Richard was alarmed. A nurse-maid had run up at the child's cries and was already leading Charles away; but the old man for a moment forgot his grandson and, white with fury, turned upon Richard.

"Wretch—malignant, unprofitable wretch!" he cried, "—to let an infant touch those things. Are you

a fiend?"

He dashed at the powerful young man and belaboured him with his umbrella, while Dick, feeling nothing of the blows, stood quite still with a fallen jaw staring before him.

William Fry hastened from the other end of the garden, as Sir George, now red as the chilis and pant-

ing heavily, stayed his arm.

"Let me do it, your honour," said the other old man.

"If he earned it."

"Earned it? Miserable coward—he has earned the cat-and-nine tails!" cried Sir George. "He has poisoned my grandson—it may mean the scaffold!"

"God's Light!" swore William. "What have the

audacious zany done now?"

"Never let me see his face again—never! He is discharged—dismissed without a character!" stormed the veteran. Then he hastened away. At the gate of the kitchen-garden he turned.

"Send him for the doctor as fast as his wicked feet can carry him," he ordered, and then ran indoors.

His aunts, his mother and Johnny were already congregated about the tortured Charles. Milk, butter,

raw eggs and other soothing substances had been collected and applied, and the sufferer was over his

first and greatest pangs.

Sir George hurried among them, related how the unutterable Richard had permitted his grandson to crunch a chili and then examined the child's mouth. It was red and inflamed; but Charles felt better and enjoyed the natural exhilaration of being on the centre of the stage. It appeared that no great harm•had been done, and when Dr. Selhurst—a crony of Sir George—presently arrived, he commended Johnny's treatment and found the boy convalescent.

So that storm passed, leaving the grandfather very greatly exhausted and Johnny furious to a degree. For Charles was her favourite. Him she spoiled, and the crime committed against him loosed her most evil passions. She swore to herself in Hindustani, called down the powers of evil upon Richard, and gave her opinion of him in English also to all who cared to

listen.

"A Jāt," she said. "He's a Jāt—a coward—a dog—only a shikari where there are no tigers. I'll tiger him! A Jāt, that when he learns manners, blows his nose with a door-mat—a Jāt—a bad smell—an unclean beast. Trust a scorpion and a snake before you trust a Jāt!"

"And what be a Jat, Miss Johnston?" asked the

cook, who listened to this outpouring.

"Them that tend the earth," she answered, "and

most of 'em are better under it."

Sir George retired early. He was exhausted and bade Gertrude read evening prayers. His daughters spoke in hushed accents of the tragedy and feared that he had hurt his heart; but in the morning he appeared refreshed and restored.

"I am perfectly well-except in mind," he said, "but

I own to a distressed night. Two wrongs do not make a right. I went a thought too far. We should never chastise in hot blood, and I have often condemned it."

He read the whole of the Litany for morning prayer—a thing he seldom did save under exceptional stress.

The child was reported well, save for blistered lips and gums; and once again Richard stood before his master in the study. The meeting was brief and they soon parted. Sir George expressed regret for his violence and then severely reprimanded Dick for his cruelty. He held, however, that ignorance and stupidity rather than deliberate evil had inspired the young man to torture a child, and since Richard's victim was restored to health, by God's mercy, the incident might be regarded as closed. Sir George hurried over this scene, since the day was to be brightened by a luncheon-party given by Miss Protheroe, and Gertrude would attend it with her father. He had looked forward to the entertainment for some time. and more than mere pleasure was destined to occupy those who partook of Miss Protheroe's hospitality: she had lent her ear to philanthropic schemes for the approaching winter. An inspiration for collecting money on a large scale had come to Mrs. Gilbert, the vicar's wife, and she attended the luncheon to indicate the nature of her wishes.

Everybody admired Sir George's new Ulster coat, which he donned for the first time on this occasion. He had secured it at Gertrude's wish against the coming winter and no need existed to wear it until the winter arrived; but the garment gave him great pleasure. It was made of thick wool, with large pockets fastened on outside, and a heavy belt, which buttoned round his waist. All praised this coat and Admiral

Ryecroft declared that he should secure one exactly like it.

They talked politics through luncheon, for Miss Protheroe was a great politician, while Mrs. Gilbert, desiring that they should be in an amiable temper before she strove to win them to her schemes, left

charity until lunch was done.

"Perhaps the best thing that has happened this year was my old friend, Lord Lawrence—his appointment to the Chair of the School Board," declared Sir George. "He is a tower of strength in any capacity—and he will, I doubt not, see that this modern craze for educating the lower classes is not pushed to unwise extremes."

"For my part, by far the most terrific thing of the year was that vote of ten millions for our Navy," said the admiral. "This is indeed stupendous."

"And yet we hear that the Navy is in a most un-

seaworthy condition," declared Miss Protheroe.

"It always is," answered Admiral Ryecroft. "It always is and always has been ever since I knew and served in it; and doubtless, despite these ten millions, it will continue so to be. And yet it remains, despite its futilities, the most tremendous weapon in the world—the trident of Neptune."

"Greater than any of these things," declared the vicar, "was, if I may say so, the passing of the Public

Worship Regulation Bill."

"Most true; and what a light the struggle threw on Gladstone!" sighed Sir George. "To think that man, with a cynicism almost impossible to conceive, opposed it."

"Happily the sound Protestant feeling of the House was against him, and all he did was to lower his own credit," declared Mr. Gilbert.

"He did more than that," explained Admiral Rye-

croft. "His opposition roused Dizzy into action, or so I see it. Had not Gladstone taken the line he did. the Iew would not have bothered his head about it, or cared a straw; but the opportunity to smite his foe was too excellent to miss."

"Our hierarchs are a supine and feeble folk," declared Sir George, "and one doubts whether even this measure will provoke them to a more courageous attitude before the recalcitrant clergy."

"The Bishops are recruited from the wrong channels," continued Miss Protheroe. "You may have

observed that they are generally schoolmasters."

"You are entirely right," replied Sir George. a good point. As schoolmasters we may grant them scholarship; but scholarship and statesmanship are vastly different qualities. Let the Dean be a scholar if you will; the Bishop should be a statesman. But, because a man may preside with success over a parcel of ushers and schoolboys, and preserve the futile and often childish traditions of an ancient seminary, it does not follow that he is qualified to control a diocese, or hold in check that turbulent and dangerous body of fanatical men now striking at the Church from within her own sacred walls."

"We want a few general officers, drafted from the army, and a man or two with the Nelson touch," declared Admiral Ryecroft. "And a retired judge perhaps-eh, Sir George? A dozen such men-administrators accustomed to command and used to be obeyed -these should be admitted into Holy Orders and advanced to the highest rank. We should swiftly establish discipline under those circumstances."

Miss Protheroe laughed heartily at this picture. "I would go round the world to see you and the admiral in lawn sleeves," she said to Sir George.

Mr. Gilbert, however, cleared his throat and looked

grave. His sacerdotal instincts were aroused. He resented the vision of laymen thrust into his profession for other gifts than righteousness.

He changed the subject to a secular incident of

comparatively recent date.

"So Ex-Marshal Bazaine has escaped from his island prison in the Mediterranean Sea," he said.

"Most exciting and romantic," declared Miss Protheroe. "They say his wife was waiting in a boat, and that she carried him off to Italy."

Admiral Ryecroft shook his head.

"The result of Gallic sentimentality," he told them. "There was only one thing to do with Bazaine, and any other marshal than MacMahon would have done it. MacMahon should have hanged him when he had the chance."

"Why?" asked Gertrude. "What was his crime, Admiral?"

"His crime, Madam, was to surrender the fortress of Metz to Germany during the recent war. He capitulated with his army under conditions which do

not bear thinking upon."

"And what of Mrs. Caterham?" inquired Sir George of his hostess. "I had the most charming communication, touching a little water-colour of the Taj Mahal, which I painted for her. A very fascinating spirit, Miss Protheroe."

"She is indeed, Sir George, and I may tell you that she entertains the greatest admiration for you,

too."

"Such a woman," he said, "will wed again. Mark me, her gifts of sympathy and understanding, her charm of mind and her native sagacity and good sense will presently make such an appeal to some wise man that she will find herself unable to resist him."

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if your prophecy

comes true," declared his hostess. "The dear woman likes, and understands your sex, Sir George."

It was not until after luncheon that Mrs. Gilbert

propounded her scheme.

"And if only I can get some of you gentlemen interested," she said, "then I shall know that all will be well. The vicar is with me heart and soul, but we want some weighty names from outside the vicarage: the appeal, if it is to succeed, demands a very considerable amount of outside patronage."

She turned to her husband.

"If you will explain the reasons, Rupert, then I

will tell everybody my idea."

"It is briefly this," began Mr. Gilbert. rigours of the coming winter find our charity reserves unduly low, and we have conceived a very considerable scheme to replenish them. The great idea is that it should be undenominational. I want to invite all my brothers in Christ, not only our kindly and generous laymen, but the shepherds of other flocks than ours. I want for once to win the rector of St. Jude's, the priest of the Roman Catholic chapel, the pastors of the Congregationalists, the Wesleyans, the Chosen Fewves, even him. I desire an appeal to all men of goodwill, that we may sink our differences in the common name of Charity, which covers so many sins, and strive together for our united poor, that we may be in a position to relieve their approaching needs. Now tell me frankly, Miss Protheroe, Sir George and you. Admiral, if the idea strikes any of you as too subversive—if it carries an element of danger—if it can be pursued by all of us in the right spirit and with good conscience."

For a moment there was silence. Then Miss Pro-

theroe spoke.

"A great and beautiful thought," she said.

"You are right," added Sir George. "For my part I can see no reason whatever against a combined movement, with this one worthy object and end in view. Had it originated with anybody but the rector of the parish, the case might be different; but coming from you, Gilbert, I'm bound to say I see no religious objection whatever. As representing the recognised church party, you take the lead, and as, you say, all men of good will should be proud to serve under your banner."

"But I shouldn't have a banner," urged Gertrude. "It isn't a case for a banner. Nobody ought to lead exactly. There ought to be a committee representing all shades of thought, and everybody ought to be equal."

"We must incur no danger of misunderstandings, my love," said Sir George, and then Admiral Ryecroft

spoke.

"A fine idea—a big thing. I'll help in my small

way. You must get at the county."

"I'm more than glad you see with me," the vicar told them. "With your support the enterprise is launched already. And now my wife will tell you of

her great conception."

"Not a bit great," declared Mrs. Gilbert, "and not very original, I'm afraid. In fact I hoped we might have a Penny Reading, only of course it would be something far, far bigger and more important in every way than an ordinary penny reading. The seats would need to be pretty highly priced, because our biggest public hall is the Assembly Room at the Royal Hotel, and that only holds three hundred persons. So they would have to pay as much as we could make them. And, if they paid a good price for the seats, we must give them a very good entertainment—something altogether out of the common. Entirely amateur of

course, because professionals would charge fees, and you can never feel sure if professionals won't be common. Their humour is often very broad. But in this neighbourhood and round about are plenty of very fine amateur performers."

"I should not feel disposed to countenance anything of a theatrical nature, Mrs. Gilbert," said Sir George. "Personally, I would attend nothing but Shakespeare,

and that must be beyond us."

"Oh no, nothing theatrical, Sir George. The Nonconformists would tolerate nothing of that kind. A concert, I thought; but of course a very exceptional concert—the very best and finest we could arrange."

"Get Lady Philbrick," advised the admiral. "She sings like an angel—opera I believe. They say, if she had been a professional, she would have superseded

Patti."

"We'll leave details till later. The first thing is to know we have your support behind us," explained Mrs. Gilbert. "Now the vicar can sound the other clergy, and if they are all willing, we have broken the back of the enterprise."

"Get Lady Philbrick," echoed Admiral Ryecroft.

The party broke up ere long and, as he took a turn beside the sea, Sir George expressed his pleasure to Gertrude. The subject interested him much and he determined to bestow a part of his sleepless energy upon it.

At dinner he raised a delicate question.

"I am wondering whether one might not actually contribute to the entertainment," he said. "What think you, my loves? Could Cherry and I give them one of our duettos on flute and harp?"

"They never seem to go very well together to me," declared Mary doubtfully; but this her father would

not allow.

"There you are in error, Queenie. We know that sackbut and psaltery do go well together. The combination is consecrated from olden time. The psalter is from the Greek psallo, to play upon the harp; while as for your sackbut, though it pleases some scholars to make a mystery about it, I see none. The word signifies a tube, or pipe. You find it in Daniel as the Syriac 'sabbeka.' Some identify it with the Greek 'sambuke,' an instrument of strings, but that is an error. The old English sackbut, or sagbut, was a trumpet of brass after the fashion of the trombone. Cowper, as I remember, speaks of 'Psalt'ry and sackbut, dulcimer and flute.'"

"Yes, Papa; but the question is whether Cherry could play in public before a large, critical audience,"

explained Gertrude.

"I should like to," said Cherry, "but I'm afraid I might be horribly nervous. In fact I'm sure I should be."

"Nervous—why nervous?" asked the old man. "What is there to be nervous about? You are there to do your best. Who can do more, even if her Majesty were present?"

"But if my best was a failure, Papa?"

"With steady practice before the event, you would be quite equal to doing yourself justice. Such an item might be a refreshing novelty and give genuine pleasure to many people, who have probably never

heard harp and flute played in unison."

Soon afterwards he insisted on trying over several pieces with Cherry; but the result was not such as to commend itself either to Gertrude or Mary. They knew people must not be asked to pay money that they might hear their father and sister tinkle and squeak together in this primitive fashion. But, very wisely, they declared mild pleasure, while withholding any

enthusiasm. They trusted that Sir George would forget all about the matter in a week; and their hope was fulfilled: his mind became swiftly occupied with practical considerations for the enterprise, and he manifested no further desire to perform himself. As for Cherry, while picturing herself in secret as seated at her harp behind a bank of flowers with a thousand eyes fixed upon her, she knew exceedingly well that no such experience could lie within her reach, and the dream soon faded.

CHAPTER XIII

Wingate was in no haste to announce his safe arrival, but at last he wrote to Mary, declared that he had come, seen and conquered Africa. Upon the journey out he made great friends with a fruit-grower from the Transvaal. Already it seemed the fickle young man began to consider that growing fruit might prove a pleasanter occupation than seeking gold or diamonds, and he invited his father's opinion upon the point. He added that his new friend was a Scot and that he possessed a very charming wife and daughter.

These things Mary read aloud and then reported

what followed.

"That is all the sense in Win's letter," she said. "The rest is nonsense. He says that he has made friends with a Zulu chief, who offers him a pick of four daughters. All want to marry Win; but he feels that one will be enough. As yet he hasn't decided which it is to be."

"Such levity is misplaced," said Sir George. "Humour is one thing: buffoonery another. But what Wingate writes about fruit-growing may be to the purpose. For my part I think that the production of choice and marketable fruits has much to commend it, and since he invites my opinion, he shall hear from me. I would far rather see him among the honest and godly Boer farmers, descended as they are from fine, religious Batavian stock, than thrust into the companionship of such men as swarm where gold is to be dug, or diamonds discovered."

In a moment Sir George's vision of his son as a pioneer had given place to this less romantic picture. He imagined Wingate as moving among his orange trees, pruning his vines and plucking peach and nectarine in their season. Far better such a life of frugal contentment, passed with dignity in the lap of nature, than any feverish hunt for the source of all evil. So Sir George reflected, and he spent the greater part of that winter morning in discoursing upon fruit over many pages. His hand was old-fashioned in its formal correctness, and he never employed one word, when his meaning could be conveyed equally well in half a dozen; but "caligraphy" was a word aptly to be used in speaking of his beautiful script. He dwelt on the uses of the citron family, the possibilities of grapes and the conviction that South Africa might yet become famous for its wines. He discussed every phase of the subject save the price of land and the length of time before new plantations might be supposed to pay for the cost of their creation. This was an aspect of the problem that did not enter his calculations.

He was much pleased with the letter and read it to his daughters after lunch. All applauded it, and then Gertrude, viewing the matter with her practical eyes,

considered its business aspect.

Sir George spoke vaguely of virgin land only waiting the cultivator's energy; but Gertrude doubted. He posted the letter, however, after adding a post-script that the preliminary labour should be done by

natives at a very trifling cost.

But a letter from his son crossed that of Sir George. This time Wingate wrote to his father, and during the early days of February there came the startling news that he was engaged to be married. To no dusky princess had he given his heart; but to the daughter of the fruit-grower. His plans were entirely changed;

and his future father-in-law, who apparently took pleasure in the engagement, had suggested that Wingate should learn his own business and apply himself to the orchard-lands. Mr. Campbell had no other children than Jenny, and it appeared that he was willing to welcome Wingate as a son. The Campbells, wrote young Westover, were not of long descent; but to this he attached no importance whatever. Mr. Campbell was "one of nature's gentlemen"—a man of the highest principles—as kindly and generous as he was prosperous and successful; while as for Jenny, she had been educated in England. She was the most beautiful and clever girl he had ever seen; her manners were perfection, and there was nothing about her remotely suggestive of the colonies. They worshipped one another, and he had never imagined there could be quite such happiness in the world.

"In fact," summed up Gertrude, "some Africanders have caught Wingate. Just a thing you might have

expected."

"You have a strange art, my love, to cast cold water on the passing hour," said Sir George rather sharply. "For my part I do not see at all why we should take a sinister view of the Campbells—at any rate until we hear more. For that matter all Campbells must be of ancient ancestry."

"As to hearing more, there's nothing more to hear, Papa," replied Gertrude calmly. "He says they are going to be married next month—that's February—and visit the Transvaal in a bullock-waggon with a span of sixteen oxen, for their honeymoon. They must

be just about starting now."

"I believe he's fallen on his legs," said Mary. "I think this is good news. Of course, with his charm and fascinating ways, he might easily have made the girl love him; but you see the father loves him too,

and no doubt the mother does also. So there you are. Mr. Campbell is a self-made man evidently, and self-made men are always pretty good students of character. They've got to be. And Mr. Campbell wouldn't have been merely taken by Wingate's good looks and charm. He naturally wants a gentleman for his daughter's husband; but unless he had seen that Wingate was more than that and might be counted upon to do well and honourably, and work hard to be a successful man, I'm sure Mr. Campbell wouldn't have allowed this."

"I think so too," said Cherry.

"Of course I hope so, and nobody loves Wingate better than I do," replied Gertrude; "but one cannot but doubt. Mr. Campbell may be in quite a small way.

Many things have yet to be told you, Papa."

"I have every reason to believe that we shall find the details agreeable, my love," answered Sir George. "Wingate is no longer a boy to be lured into some unseemly alliance and bring tribulation upon our heads. I am not arguing that he has shown as much intelligence or foresight as at one time I hoped would appear; but tradition will often guide and control where intelligence lacks. I take a sanguine view of this great news. I am pleased. We must do our part, in the large and family spirit I have always inculcated and practised. Wedding gifts are involved and many communications to the people now to be united with us."

Cherry looked uneasily at Gertrude, but the elder only tightened her lips while Sir George proceeded.

"I may tell you that I had always designed for Wingate a moiety of my estate on my decease. Our Queenie has her pension; but for you, Gertrude, and Cherry, half would have been apportioned, while Wingate took the rest. My dear elder son, James, received his share when I bought him his practice, and

his sister was not forgotten on her marriage I need hardly say. What remains of the estate-"

"But dearest Papa," broke in Gertrude, "there is

no estate—only your pension; and you live beyond it."
"Tchut! Tchut!" said Sir George. "Tchut, my love; there is always an estate! You know nothing of these large questions, Gertrude, though inimitable on points of detail. What I was coming to, when you saw fit to interrupt me, was Wingate's patrimony. The question is whether, at this climax of his fortunes. I had not better present him with capital and place him in a position where he can speak to Campbell, man to man and independently. It must not for an instant be supposed that Wingate is a penniless adventurer."

"But everybody knows it, Papa. That's practically what he is. Wingate is the most honourable of men. He would not have deceived Mr. Campbell about that. He went to Africa to make his fortune."

"And he has—I honestly believe he has," said Mary. "No," continued Sir George, shaking his head at Gertrude; "we may take it for granted that no son of mine would have pretended the thing that was not, or led these worthy people to suppose that he had either wealth or influence behind him; but so much the more reason that they should be agreeably surprised when Wingate is in a position to tell them that he has received substantial support from his father. Mr. Campbell will expect to hear something of this kind, and it is right, having regard to my position, that he should. These things may very well be left to me I think. Fear nothing, my Gertrude. I have lived a great many more years in the world than have you, and the problems that I solved in the past, I can solve again."

"But in the past you had your judge's salary, Papa.

That was quite different," said Mary.

"True, Queenie," he replied. "I had for the moment overlooked that fact. I must fall back on what is called 'accommodation.' My men of business will doubtless accommodate me in this matter. Be sure that passing circumstance is not going to stand between me and my son. Adequate recognition of his altered state must certainly be made by his family."

"Perhaps Aunt Harriet——" began Cherry, but Sir

George checked her.

"Your aunt will be informed; but we must not count upon anything of that sort. Indeed, I think that she was not best pleased with Wingate during his stay here. He saw her but once, and she wrote of him without admiration for anything but his good looks. No, this, as I repeat, is a question of accommodation. I design a visit to London during the coming spring, and I shall then wait upon Messrs. Adshead, my solicitors, and invite them so to order matters that I may put Wingate's portion into his hands. I aspire to send him five thousand pounds."

"Papa!" gasped Gertrude, but he smiled upon her, "To you that may appear a considerable sum, dear Gerty," he answered; "in reality it is nothing. Accommodation will cover it with ease. Such things are doubtless commonplaces with Messrs. Adshead. They may call upon me to insure my life, or take some other steps to render the situation satisfactory; but these details lie with them. I envisage the future without fear."

"That blessed word "'accommodation,' " murmured Mary to her younger sister. She was the only member of the family who possessed a sense of humour.

A week after these incidents, the great concert for the amelioration of want in Dawmouth took place at the Assembly Rooms. All leaders of religious thought had combined to make the entertainment a success. The place was packed with people, and the programme

full of variety.

Cherry, with her family, attended, and pictured herself bowing to that distinguished audience. As before, she imagined herself and her harp behind the bank of aspidistras and holly which separated the stage from the body of the hall; and she felt thankful that no such thing was going to happen.

Mr. Adam Baker, who possessed a resonant tenor voice and had come down on purpose for the concert, sang a solo; and a Miss Evans, to whom it was understood he had become engaged, accompanied him. She was fair, not handsome, and of the undeterminate type that Mr. Baker evidently favoured. Cherry regarded

her with interest and a measure of wonder.

"What on earth could he have seen in her?" she whispered to Mary, who knew the particulars of her fleeting romance.

"It is always a fearful mystery what our friends see

in their other friends," answered the widow.

CHAPTER XIV

HAVING celebrated his eightieth birthday in good health, Sir George prepared for a visit to London. He had engaged himself to many friends and now kept various promises of long standing. The later weeks of May and the first fortnight of June he would spend among old Eastern acquaintance; and it was the death of an Indian colleague during the winter that finally decided him to postpone his expedition no longer.

"These old fellows begin to drop out," he said, "and I must go among them once more before it is too late."

He went alone; but Mary, who was spending six weeks with her husband's mother, had planned her return to coincide with Sir George's, and they intended to come home together.

He drove off from Belmont Lodge to the station, when the train arrived entered a first-class carriage, and removing his silk hat, fitted a travelling cap over his white head and arranged his rug, his papers, his

flask and his packet of sandwiches.

"Take all care of yourselves, my dear girls," he begged, "and allow nothing to trouble or inconvenience you. The documents to which I referred are in the top drawer of my desk on the right hand side. They represent various demands, and some I have delayed to pay, though they have matured, for the reason that I suspect error on the part of the tradesmen. Where you find a note of interrogation appended in red ink, question the accounts. The butcher I fear you will find the principal offender. Good-bye—Good-bye! God bless and keep you both!"

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The great, broad-gauged train lumbered away along the sea front, and Cherry and Gertrude set their faces homeward. They did not fear for their father, for no spot of weakness had yet developed in his body. His senses were still remarkably acute; he was active as ever; he slept well; continued to rise early and often distracted Gertrude by playing his flute and joining the aubade of the birds at dawn, while still she desired some further hours of sleep.

But "the top drawer on the right hand side" held many a thorny problem. Sir George regarded it as a sort of oubliette into which offenders of the peace might be dropped; but unfortunately they did not permit themselves to be forgotten. There came reminders of their existence, and Gertrude's father had declared that upon his return from town he intended to investigate the accumulation and dispel the increas-

ing cloud that it began to cast.

"It is a good thing in a way that Mary is not here," said Cherry. "She always does back up Papa so."
"We all back up Papa," answered Gertrude; "but

"We all back up Papa," answered Gertrude; "but I am afraid from one or two things that I have noticed in the shops, that——"

"A sort of constraint," suggested Cherry.

"We will go through that horrible drawer after luncheon," declared Gertrude. "I'll get you to help me, if you will."

"And Johnny. Johnny's memory is iron where the

butcher's concerned. She hates him."

"Dear Papa has a brilliant imagination in some things—large things, like politics and the welfare of India—and so on—but none in domestic affairs," explained Gertrude. "He thinks that because he hardly eats anything and can thrive for twenty-four hours on a morsel of spinach and an egg, or a small sole and a potato, that everybody else should do the same. He doesn't know an atom what a servant eats, or even what we eat."

"He thinks we all eat too much."

"We may; but because he thinks so, it doesn't follow in the least that anybody is going to eat less. If I told them that in the kitchen, they'd all give notice at once—naturally. And the absurd thing is that dear Papa, because he eats like a bird, is under the impression that he saves a great deal of money and is therefore justified in spending it in the garden, or on presents to people. His mania for presents is very embarrassing at times, Cherry. He gives presents to people who don't want them and would much rather not have them. He puts people under a stupid obligation, which they feel no wish to incur. They don't like him any the better for it—quite the contrary."

"He doesn't think of that. He hasn't any belief in gratitude. He does it because he loves doing it. It's selfishness in a way. It pleases him to give. But he's as proud as a peacock about taking. If anybody

gives him anything, he is quite uneasy."

"Just so. And yet he doesn't see a bit that others

may feel the same."

They faced the sinister contents of the top drawer on the right hand side after their luncheon, and swiftly called Miss Johnston to aid their researches. She found much to arouse her indignation, especially in the butcher's memoranda.

"There's whole legs of lamb and sirloins of beef slipped in here," she said. "A wicked swindle—and that barefaced! It's always the way if you let an account run. They get back on you by popping in a lot of meat that never existed, but in their own wicked hearts. A Kasāi never tells the truth. If he did, he wouldn't be a Kasāi. And Mrs. Bertram's bill for

them new sailor suits for Master Charles and Master Wilford! Tailors are always too sharp for the angel of death—same all over the world."

She subsided to investigate appeals from the washerwoman; while Gertrude strove to bring order into other accounts, some of which Cherry felt very sure

had already been paid.

"The ironmonger was certainly paid for the coalbox, because I was with Papa and he paid on the spot," she said. They argued this point, for Gertrude doubted; then came a moan from Johnny.

"Oh my God!" she cried, "and I've befriended this

woman and had her to tea a score of times."

"I never liked Mrs. Jarvis," murmured Cherry; "but

she's the fourth we've had and she can wash."

"You'll need to change again, Miss, all the same. This is highway robbery. They're all alike and the oftener you change the bitches the better."

"Hush, Johnny! You forget yourself," said Ger-

trude.

"Why don't you wash at home and get free of 'em? I've always said we can do it," answered Miss Johnston.

"Papa would never consent to see clothes drying in

the kitchen-garden, Johnny."

"Well, Sir George will have to consent to worse things than that if he don't watch these vultures a bit closer," prophesied the old woman. Indeed she was not comforting. She suffered from tooth-ache at the time and took a dark view of the future.

"It don't matter for us old ones," she admitted. "We shall get beyond the reach of tradespeople in a few years; but what you lambs will do I don't know. I don't want to go and leave you at the mercy of a

lot of thieves."

"You're not going-you're not going for years and

years yet," declared Cherry. "Have your tooth out

and you'll be well again."

"A dubla eats when he can and leaves his funeral to God," said the old woman, "and I've long been content to do the same."

"We must fight," declared Gertrude. "I'll leave the butcher and the washerwoman to you, Johnny; but do go gently and tactfully. You can be so clever and ingratiating when you like. Don't dash at them; just reason with them. Wait till your tooth is comfortable."

Johnny promised to be diplomatic.

"I can twist the butcher round my thumb, Miss, when I lower myself to do so; and for the family's sake I will," she promised.

"We must try and smooth things out and pay off as many of the little ones as we can, before Papa

comes back," Gertrude decided.

"And we won't tell Papa anything to cloud him while he's away," added Cherry. "He hasn't had a holiday since we left Gloucestershire and it will do him a great deal of good to see his old friends and London and so on."

"No; he must have his holiday undisturbed of

course."

"I wonder if Wingate could help, now he's married and going to be his father-in-law's right hand?" mused Cherry. But her sister resented the suggestion.

"How common you are sometimes!" she said. "How

can you think of such things, Cherry?"

"Well, a son may be allowed to help his father, Gertrude."

"Not, surely, with another person's money? You talk as though Wingate possessed capital earned by himself. At present that is not so."

"I'm sorry," replied the younger. "All the same, Wingate is earning a salary."

"I hope so. In any case he will want to keep it for his own wife and establishment."

There came a letter from Sir George after he had been absent three weeks. He was a great writer and held old-fashioned notions respecting the post. A letter from him occupied many pages and was always written with care and thought. He had often been told that he wrote wonderful letters, and he enjoyed the labour of composition.

Gertrude read the communication to Cherry after their breakfast. He wrote from the house of a friend in Cadogan Square:

My DEAR LOVES:

All is vastly well with me, and I react favourably to the brisk air of the metropolis. London is a lazy place, but so far I have managed to preserve my customary energy, though my dear doctor son, James, has warned me against undue activity. I paid my first visit to him a fortnight ago and was well pleased to find him and his family in excellent health. He may, by good chance, be able to spend a few days with us in the autumn. He is growing grey, which makes his handsome brown face the more attractive in my opinion. Some trick of atavism has thrown him back to his maternal ancestors and he might pass for a full-blooded Indian. Infinite kindness and the old charm of manner characterise him. He devoted two hours to me and finds me in trustworthy condition. Nowadays there is a saying amongst the most modern physicians that a man is "as old as his arteries," and James finds, after applying certain scientific tests, that my arteries maintain a quality of resilience that would be satisfactory in a man of sixty. Thus, by the blessing of God, length of days would seem to be assured, unless it is His pleasure to cut short my life by some hidden operation of His Will.

I dined with Lord Lawrence and found him little changed. He proved to be entirely in agreement with me

on the subject of our Eastern Empire and urged me to pay a visit to the Secretary for India. Diffidence would have prevented such a step; but, at his wish, I undertook the task and spent the best part of half an hour in the company of the Marquis of Salisbury himself. He received me with great urbanity and proved largely in agreement with my contentions, founded as they are on half a lifetime in the country; but he is hampered by administrators: I can see that. Edmund Burke, in his speech on conciliation with America, said (almost exactly a hundred years ago), that "a great empire and little minds go ill together"; and our great empire of India continues to suffer acutely from highly-placed men on the spot, whose little minds conceive that India was created by Providence for the convenience of Great Britain in general and Lancashire in particular. Such intellect as certain forcible feeble persons betray out there, would disappoint one in a tadpole. But it appears that his lordship is powerless, and fears my views too idealistic to appeal to the government. enjoyed to hear of the old East India Company and the early days of the century. It was a privilege to meet this distinguished, rising statesman, for he possesses a wide grasp of affairs and a vision not easily clouded. probable that Disraeli's mantle may fall upon Lord Salisbury's shoulders at a future time; and they are quite broad enough to bear it in every sense.

On Sunday I heard the famous Spurgeon deliver one of his addresses—a coarse but vigorous speaker with a gift of rhetoric that appeals to the uneducated masses. An earnest, faithful man, but singularly unattractive to me.

How life re-adjusts one's opinions! As you know I detest Mr. Gladstone, and all his works, yet his pamphlet against the Vatican finds me wholly in agreement with its admirable and scholarly invective. Again take Prince Bismarck, whom I profoundly distrust—he, too, shares my hatred of the Papal power. The Pope, by the way, has created an American Cardinal—an action the United States may live deeply to regret. But my point is that when we see those we cannot trust, suddenly moving

shoulder to shoulder with us, it behaves the honest man to abate prejudice and preserve an attitude even to his enemies unsullied by personal rancour. At my age there should come a quality of ripeness into judgment, and though the vision of the old may not be so clear-cut as that of men in their prime, yet lack of detail is atoned for by a greater largeness and synthesis of judgment. What seemed so simple at twenty-five, may become exceedingly complex at fifty, and quite incomprehensible to the understanding of three score years and ten. Human nature is. in fact, a problem that the length of a man's days and the strength of human intelligence do not enable any of us to resolve in its entirety. The explanation is hidden with our Maker, and an "agnostic" attitude, though wholly vile before Divine revelation, has something to commend it in our interchanges with our fellow men.

And now to astound you not a little! I have been to a play-house—surely another instance that I am still learning something of the mysteries of life and enlarging the confines of my intelligence. It was Cunningham's doing. I had dined with him and renewed a cherished acquaintance of half a century's standing. Then came a forenoon when I entertained him at the Club to luncheon, and he told me how Lady Cunningham was incapacitated from attending the play that evening, and that he held two stalls for the Prince of Wales's Theatre and begged me to come instead. "My dear fellow," I said, "you-know my opinion of the theatre."

"I share it," he replied; "but we are concerned with something in the highest traditions of the stage—a production of Shakespeare's. 'The Merchant of Venice,' pro-

duced in the finest manner possible."

To make a long story short, he overbore my scruples; I dined with him and, afterwards, he carried me to the play in a hansom cab. The experience proved unique and entirely satisfactory. Everything was done with refined taste and perfect propriety. The scenery impressed me as most admirable, yet not over ornate. A Mr. Coghlan impersonated Shylock; but he lacked fire and failed, in my

opinion, to display the baffled malignity and ferocious temper of the Jew. He wanted us apparently to sympathise with Shylock, which I conceive was the last thing in the world that Shakespeare intended. Portia was played with exquisite distinction, humour and beauty by a young actress named Ellen Terry. The lady is blessed by Providence in mind and body, for she is lovely to look upon, her intonation has the most exquisite quality and she uses speech with consummate art. Each inflexion is pure and melodious as the note of a bell. Her voice is a sort of spoken music—something amazingly attractive. scene was played with an incomparable charm, a radiant, living force and an emotion that made one feel both the mastery of the poet and his beautiful interpreter. gifted woman was assuredly born to add another joy to Shakespeare, and I would go far to see her in Beatrice, in Rosalind, or in Juliet. Since I went to hear Edmund Kean at Drury Lane in my young days, I have never seen genius on the stage to compare with that displayed by this fairy-like creature: while only less admirable because less important, was the playing of Miss Carlotta Addison in the subordinate character of Nerissa.

And now, alas! I have to relate an experience of a very different and very depressing nature. In a word. my visit to Messrs. Adshead has not been attended with success. I saw young Mr. Adshead himself, the son of my old friend, who is now no more, and greatly to my surprise, I found that the "accommodation" which I had regarded as a mere matter of form, so far as details were concerned, is not practicable. Mr. Adshead harped on "security" till I was weary of the word, and when I explained that I designed to insure my life, on a basis of ten to fifteen years, he declared that the tables of mortality, whatever they may be, would present a formidable obstacle to insuring at all! This is a perverse and highly unscientific attitude in my opinion. I explained to him the youth of my arteries; but he suspected the insurance actuary would attach no importance to that fact. In truth the man was neither encouraging nor helpful, and I did

not invite him to luncheon as I had designed to do. He spoke gloomily of other things also, and his examination of the general situation caused me uneasiness and cast me down. As we used to say in India, pen-butchers are worse than cow-butchers!

On leaving the City, I found myself in no mood for physical refreshment, but alighted at the National Gallery and calmed myself among the masterpieces of Turner, Claude and other great painters. I was saddened by the reflection that the immortal Landseer had so recently passed from among us, and became gradually fired to turn a little more attention to my own modest landscapes of the Orient. We must move my early picture from the place of honour, which Gertrude gave it in the drawing-room, and substitute a new work I already have created by anticipation. I suspect that rather antiquated drawing of English scenery must have been painted in my "twenties" at the wish of my dear grandmother. Otherwise I cannot account for it, since it differs so materially from my later and more matured style.

On leaving the Gallery I repaired to Messrs. Winsor and Newton's establishment and purchased a couple of boxes of their best water-colour paints, a good stock of large-sized drawing-paper, a new board and sundry pencils and brushes of camels' hair—so you see I shall, next

winter, enter upon a serious artistic campaign.

Three nights ago I dined with the Waldegraves and, much to my gratification (and I think to hers) met that most attractive and charming woman, Mrs. Caterham. She is affianced to a Colonel Leslie Macgregor of the Scots Guards, and they design to wed next autumn. He is a lucky fellow, for I have rarely met Mrs. Caterham's like in feminine charm and intelligence. She holds that the Colonel has been slighted by the War Office and his special recent work on our frontiers much undervalued. But so it ever is with that authority. "When the work is done," I said to Mrs. Caterham, "who remembers the carpenter?"

Life is so full and varied here, and all this movement

and action have a tendency to keep one so active and so young, that sometimes I have wondered, when our lease of Belmont Lodge terminates in two years' time, whether, instead of renewing it, we might transfer ourselves to London. I suspect you girls would have a more cheerful and attractive existence here. However, we will debate that problem when we meet again, and have reduced the contents of the right hand top drawer to reason and order.

To return to Wingate, we must, of course, take some steps to secure him that measure of eleemosynary consideration his present position demands. Something must be done, though I hesitate to borrow, for my experience, happily very small, of the moneylender, is by no means in

his favour.

And now, my dearest loves, it is time that I took temporary farewell. Mary has learned that her brother-in-law is still minded to adopt Wilford; but I am not prepared to reopen the question. In future I design to begin a light course of instruction for both Charles and Wilford, so that, when they are of age to start to a day school, they shall not begin scholastic life with empty heads.

Farewell and mention me always in your prayers.

Your devoted father.

GEORGE WESTOVER.

P.S.—The Gurkwar of Baroda—a tyrannical voluptuary of the worst Indian type—is said to have attempted the life of Colonel Phayre—the British Resident. I have little doubt this terrible charge is true. He must no doubt be deposed; but our fatal lenity will hesitate to execute him, as he so richly deserves.

"A beautiful letter," said Cherry, "-just like

Papa."

"A very disquieting letter," answered Gertrude, sighing and putting the sheets together; "but just like Papa as you say."

CHAPTER XV

On a very wet day Johnny was chattering to the children, singing and telling them stories. They could always be charmed into goodness by an entertainment from the old woman, and she sat now with Mary's baby on her lap, while Charles and Wilford

stood in front of her.

"A Jolāhā got into his boat to row away from the village where he lived," said Johnny. "On a dark night he crept away, and he rowed and rowed and rowed all night; but he forgot to pull up the anchor, and so when the morning came, there he was just where he started from! And he said, 'Behold, my dear native village loves me so much that it couldn't lose me and has come too!"

Charles shouted with delight and Wilford smiled.

Then Johnny began to sing:

"'Trust a tiger, a scorpion, a snake; but a Baniya's word you never can take."

She made the elder children sing this with her, and then, when they were tired of the melody, broke out into another.

"The fisherman Dom had seven wives and never a bed for one," chanted Miss Johnston, and all were singing these words shrilly together when Mary came in. She had returned home some few days sooner than her father, who received and accepted an invitation that prolonged his absence by a week.

"The weather's breaking. I think Nelly can take them all out for a walk," said the children's mother, and then Johnny, who had a dreadful art to collect grievances until they were numerous and then pour

them out in a flood, began to grumble.

"Let 'em all go out to their deaths if you please," she said. "Of course I don't know what's right and what's wrong about weather. You cabal against me and make the children as wilful as yourself."

Mary, who had been expecting an outburst for some

time, was glad that the blow had fallen.

"What do you mean, my old dear?" she asked; and when the nurse-maid had been summoned to dress the children, the ancient woman began. Her eyes glittered behind the steel-rimmed glasses which she wore. She gestured much, for she was a born actress, and loved to move and pose while she sang, told stories, or related her wrongs.

"First there's that beastly Nelly," she said. "Too fond of putting saffron on her forehead she is—a saucy minx; and what has she to pride herself upon? She's

no better than a cow."

"We've had such a number of changes. Do try and make friends. She's so kind to the children and so clean."

"Too kind to the children. You don't want 'em spoiled. She's ruining Master Charles. Ruining him; and him with such a treacherous nature."

"He hasn't got a treacherous nature, Johnny. He's

only very highly strung."

"Like a Pathān is Charles," vowed the ancient, shaking her head. "A saint one moment, a devil the next. A most difficult child—and sly—sly. A deep one."

"Not a bit, Johnny. I think baby is the deep one. He knows how to get round you anyhow. When Papa comes home, he's going to start lessons every morning for Charlie and Wilford."

"He'd better take lessons himself," grumbled the elder. "Sir George did ought to get somebody to teach him to trust folk less and keep his money in his pocket."

"I'm afraid nobody will ever teach him to do that."

"There's too many hanging on him," said Johnny. "Why the mischief don't some of you girls marry and ease his back?"

"I shall never marry again. I've got my boys, and my life will be lived for them."

"You might do 'em a better turn by marrying a man with a lot of money, however. Step-fathers can generally be trusted, though step-mothers cannot. And if you won't go in again, why shouldn't Miss Cherry? A heaven-born wife, and a parson wanted her, and a very nice man too."

"I believe Cherry will marry some day. She's quite

willing."

"A heaven-born wife," repeated Johnny. "And if you're going to send your children out into that rain, God forgive you. I won't be responsible, and Master Wilford will get the croup again; and next time he do, you may live to mourn him."

It was pouring once more, and the nursery policy of those days being to dread showery weather and fresh air as though they were plagues, Johnny had her way; the children were sealed up once more and their mother devoted the next hour to their entertainment.

Sir George duly returned, bringing presents for the whole household. They had not the heart to reveal the difficulties until he should have dined and slept. He was in perfect health and most excellent spirits. He told of his adventures and of the varied invitations he had extended to others, though it appeared improbable that any of his old acquaintance would accept them.

"I must go to Honiton and spend a night with your

Aunt Harriet presently, when I have settled down," he said. "I have met numerous common friends and shall have much to tell her that will entertain her."

"She's been ill-caught cold driving; but she's

better," Cherry told him.

"So much the more reason for an early visit. I may

spend a couple of nights with her."

The opening seemed too good to lose and Gertrude spoke of Wingate. They were sitting at the window of the drawing-room drinking coffee on the night of Sir George's return.

"I wonder, Papa," she said, "seeing that your lawyers were unfortunately unable to manage the—the accommodation, whether dear Aunt Harriet——?"

"Hush, my love!" cried her father. "Consider, my Gerty. I feel sure that you speak on impulse. Such a suggestion is in the highest degree inexpedient. argues doubtful taste—it does indeed. If we have to face some temporary embarrassment in our determination to recognise Wingate's altered state in a fitting manner, then we must be prepared to do so. For my son and the future head of your family, girls, I venture to think no sacrifice is anything but a privilege. However, we will examine that question to-morrow. thrift must be our motto, then I shall be the first to set the example. Undying and sleepless thrift will be nothing to me, for, thank God, my wants are few and my needs not many. But your aunt must learn nothing of these matters. I would not have her dream that circumstances demanded any secret privations here. Far from it-far from it."

He produced his London presents and their hearts sank before them. Even Mary, who never hesitated to support him, found tears in her eyes and hastened away with Miss Johnston's gift, that she might hide her own concern.

Gertrude showed no emotion. She thanked and kissed her father for a radiant shawl, and Cherry tearfully sat opening and shutting an enormous fan of

pearl and peacock's feathers.

But next morning, after Sir George had perambulated his garden and stove-house, spoken with Fry and looked at his orchids and his Cape gooseberries, Gertrude endeavoured to impress him with a sense of reality.

She told her story, related the nature of her activities and then summoned Mary, who had also very definite

things to say.

Sir George's head sank lower and lower before the melancholy tale.

"Astounding!" he murmured from time to time.

"Astounding!"

"There's nothing, of course, to worry about really, Papa; but I do feel we might be wise to adopt a different method and avoid these accumulations," concluded Gertrude.

"You are absolutely right," he answered. "It shall be our watchword, Gerty—to avoid accumulations. Like autumn leaves these things seem to descend stealthily, one by one, and we are only conscious of the number that have fallen when we begin to sweep them up. Remorseless thrift must be inculcated in every department. Each of us, according to our powers, must contribute to the general control and cutting down. I will set an example. I shall to-day devote a considerable amount of thought to my expenditure."

"Meantime if you can manage a hundred and fifty pounds, Papa, we shall be straightened out until the autumn. In this connection Queenie wants to speak to you. Queenie has a splendid head for figures, and has been invaluable since she came home." "I am sure of it," he answered, and then Mary ex-

plained that she, too, had been taking thought.

"An immense deal of this extra expense has been entirely due to me and my children, Papa; and you must be reasonable about this very serious matter," she began. "You see Wilford Bertram is still ready and willing to take my second boy. That you decline

to permit."

"Absolutely, my love. Your little Wilford, if I am any student of character, may make a respectable figure in the world. He has good intellect and a steadfast disposition. Trade for him would be more than distasteful to me; nor can I honestly approve of your brother-in-law's outlook on life. A worthy fellow—a money-getter and industrious: I have not a word against him; but the vision of the man of business has an earthy quality that I deplore. The mind of youth is swiftly coloured, and that tinct, or taint, the whole of subsequent life is not long enough to wash away. Wilford must be brought up in our traditions, and for the next ten years it is my purpose to instil a standpoint and create a foundation for character, so that when the boy reaches adolescence, he may be equipped to take his place in the history of the Westovers—among the greatest and best of us."

"Very well, Papa. Then if I agree to that, you must meet me in the matter of money, and let me do a great deal more here, and share the housekeeping and clothe my children and pay for all the countless little additions to your expenses that they represent. I say nothing about myself. I will stop with you and love to stop; but you must be reasonable. I have nearly three hundred pounds in the bank and I do think—and so does Gertrude—that you must, in justice to us all, let me spend this money at once and put us straight."

Sir George was smiling and appeared conscious of the fact.

"It is not this startling determination that amuses me, my Queenie," he said, "but a side-issue—the mention of my grandchildren's clothing. The tailor in all climes provokes to a sort of veiled detestation. Why I hardly know. Yet so it is. In India they say, 'If the poisonous snake gets into the tailor's house, let him stop there!' Yet how should we fare without these industrious artificers? For my part, when in London, I took occasion to purchase three new suits; and I received nothing but courtesy and civility. My measurements are unchanged and—""

"But dear Papa, about Queenie," begged Gertrude, and to their immense relief the old man proved not

obdurate.

"Queenie, it seems, holds a pistol to my head," he answered humorously. "That a child should thus challenge her begetter is doubtless a sign of the times. I am not a fighting man—"

"Oh yes you are, Papa, nobody more so," declared

Mary.

"Not with my offspring. I will meet you half-way. As to the temporary need of disbursement, that is my affair; but if in future it is to be a question between the destiny of my little Wilford and your further participation in current expenses, then I yield. You shall consult with Gertrude as to the proportions; but let nothing interfere, my love, between passing problems and the paramount and all-important matter of saving. Let it be your duty, every year, to add a little to your capital at any cost. No matter what your temptations, set aside a fraction annually, and then, in time to come, you will have an increased income. The habit of saving is shockingly neglected; and yet not only the pros-

perity of the individual, but the welfare of the nation depends upon that great principle. This our Chancellors of the Exchequer never have and probably never will have the wit to appreciate. They make thrift impossible and promote a reckless spirit in the contrary direction."

"Splendid advice, Papa," answered Mary, "and I'll

do my very best to act upon it."

"For Wilford," continued Sir George, "I sometimes picture a military or diplomatic career. He may even follow in my footsteps and enter the Indian Civil Service, if his intelligence and intellect develop as I have every reason to hope."

Gertrude cut short the interview.

"I think that is all for the moment, dear Papa," she

said, fearing that he would return to Wingate.

But, though her father made no mention of his son at that time, he brooded long upon the subject and while they left him cheerful, they found him melancholy at a later period of the day. For many mornings he did not play his flute, and Cherry's harp was not heard, since nothing but the sad movement from

Beethoven's Sonata would appeal to his mood.

By day he entrenched himself behind his Bibles, and there haunted his mind an active melancholy that, at this great stage in Wingate's fortunes, he could do nothing for his son. He preached thrift at uncomfortable moments and reproved Gertrude for putting two lumps of sugar in Mary's tea, when one had sufficed. Himself he went without sugar for two days and ate so little that Mary said she would call in Dr. Selhurst if his appetite did not improve. He wanted to give up the weekly drives; but this was not permitted. He found Cherry the most comforting of his daughters at this period and usually asked her to take his constitutional with him. But driving was often interrupted,

for the wet summer of 1875 descended in torrents upon the earth. The harvest was largely spoiled; the holiday season ruined; and at Belmont Lodge the famous Indian convolvulus failed for the first time to mature its azure glories for lack of sunshine.

Gertrude, to hearten her father, suggested a dinnerparty; but he declined the proposal, a decision that

filled the household with serious concern.

CHAPTER XVI

SIR GEORGE was sitting among his Bibles on a wet day in October. He had been much "under the weather" of late and, as he said, the equinoctial gales chimed very appositely with other blasts that beat upon him. Not only his own affairs created oppression and discomfort; but he perceived in the world at large a leaven working to dilute those qualities of religious vigour, self-restraint and self-command without which, in his opinion, no nation could hope to sustain greatness. He feared for England; mistrusted the nation's rulers; much feared that the leaders of the Church were but a feeble folk and not masters of their own house.

Gertrude entered with a telegram; and since a telegram was always considered to throw down any barrier, she did not depart on seeing her father's occupation. He took off his glasses and spoke to her.

"The Pandit reads his Scriptures and the Mullah his Qurān, my Gertrude; men make a thousand shows and each proclaims that he has discovered the everlasting fire; yet none finds God. And we—we Christians—who are blessed above all mankind with the veritable and authentic Light—we set about to dim it."

"Yes, Papa-a telegram, Papa."

"For the most part messengers of woe, my love. They seldom contain good news for the middle-aged in my experience."

He read and shook his head.

"From Bath. Your dear Uncle Jerome is dangerously ill. At his time of life, we must not apprehend a happy issue. I shall go up to-morrow."

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Sir George spoke of his soldier brother, and on the following day, accompanied by Gertrude, he proceeded to Bath. He was in time and no more. General Westover, a man of eighty-seven, recognised his brother and his niece and took farewell of them. They remained for the funeral and were chief mourners. The ancient soldier had no nearer relatives, for wife and son—an only child—were dead.

The incident wakened a secret hope in the hearts of Sir George's daughters. They knew that their Uncle Jerome had little enough to leave; but they hoped that little might accrue to their embarrassed parent.

Johnny voiced their private ambition without

reticence.

"If the General has remembered Sir George, it'll be a God-send," she said to Mary. "He never stood in such need of 'a come-by-chance' as he does now, and there ain't none to look to but his family that I can see."

General Westover, however, had passed in complete ignorance of his brother's circumstances. It was an unwritten law that not a whisper of any temporal tribulation should be uttered, and though, had they anticipated their uncle's death, Cherry and Mary might have been tempted to break that law and hint to him something of their father's difficulties, no such thing happened, and Jerome Westover died unaware of the facts. He believed his brother George in good circumstances; and he left his money—some few thousand pounds—to his brother Thomas—a clergyman—the capital to go ultimately to the charities of Bath.

A circumstance at the funeral had cast down Sir George, for the service was taken by Canon Westover, his remaining brother, and the Canon pursued a ritual

much too advanced to please Gertrude's father.

"He calls himself 'broad,' " murmured the old man

as they returned home through the levels of Somersetshire on a radiant autumn afternoon; "but it is not so. I perceived certain ceremonial rites to be deprecated most strongly."

"Uncle Tom read the great chapter beautifully,

Papa."

"As to that, I cannot agree with you. Thomas has aged considerably during the last few years. He is but eighteen months older than I, yet a withered and broken man. He lacks the Westover vitality. This doubtless is the result of retirement. There was no reason at all why he should have given up his parish at seventy-three, especially seeing that he had no hobbies and active occupations, as in my case. To retire, if you have nothing but your profession to interest you, is a very great mistake. Nothing ages like idleness."

"He is writing a book on the church bells of Glouces-

tershire."

"A somewhat frivolous subject in my opinion."
"I had a chat with him before the funeral, and he

hoped you were getting on with your autobiography."
"Plenty of time—plenty of time. I must live

"Plenty of time—plenty of time. I must live several more chapters, my Gerty, before I shall begin the actual composition. An autobiography argues a man on the shelf; and in any case I am inclined to suspect that too many of us old Indians produce these volumes. I have read about a dozen, and, with one or two exceptions, they added neither to knowledge or edification. There is an inclination to under-value the Babu. As a rule I grant him an Eastern donkey with a Western bray, as somebody so wittily remarked; but he is a growing power and it is idle to pooh-pooh the influence of these busy and pushful gentlemen. They will have to be admitted to take their place beside the European rulers, and though I deplore the fact, it cannot be ignored."

Sir George, as Christmas approached, became somewhat more cheerful, though there existed no reason for his better spirits, and already gathering thunder-clouds presaged a storm that might blow him out of Belmont Lodge. His daughters held anxious conferences, but as yet had come to no decisions; while he made the usual preparations for the holiday and invited his sister at Honiton to join him for the occasion.

Lady Warner, however, was not well, and wrote that she felt unequal to any festivities at present. Her decision occasioned relief for her nieces and brought regret to her brother. He was not unaware of the fact that considerable difficulties demanded to be faced and momentous decisions taken at an early date; but, within the aura of Christmas, he cast these things from him.

"Let no cloud darken the celebration of our Saviour's natal day," he said. "It is the children's festival, and we must see that the little ones, who are ignorant that Christmas Day is also Quarter Day, shall associate it with pure happiness while they may, and cleave to its eternal significance rather than those disagreeable relations thrust upon the Anniversary by foolish man."

He entered into a little plot with Johnny and his two elder grandsons. They rehearsed a carol privately in the nursery, and when Christmas morning came, there burst forth a sudden entertainment of music. A red dawn light already filtered through the landing window when Johnny, Charles and Wilford, to the shrill and tremulous notes of Sir George's flute, broke into song:

"Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the new-born King,"

shouted Johnny and the children; and the servants in their secluded chamber heard, while Sarah laughed

and Susan, the cook, who knew what the day was going to mean for her, used a strong word before this loss of her last hour's sleep. Elsewhere Gertrude sighed and turned over; Cherry smiled and sat up; Mary, leaping from her bed, joined her little boys and added her voice to theirs.

The salute, however, was brief, because Charles and Wilford desired to return to their Christmas stockings, wherein the hope of the Day for them began.

Sir George, who was clad in a purple dressing-gown with crimson decorations, kissed his daughter and blessed her; then he retired and for another hour peace reigned and the winter dawn broke.

The old man descended laden with parcels to the breakfast table. Each was carefully packed, and after

prayers they were distributed.

Later he went into the garden and presented William Fry with a pipe and tobacco pouch, and to his son,

Richard, a knife containing many instruments.

Admiral Ryecroft dined with them and brought presents for the sisters. His gifts cost him nothing, for at these times he dipped into his collection of curiosities gathered from all parts of the world, and produced netsuké from Japan, colour-prints from China and natural objects—shells, corals and native weapons and vessels accumulated on far tropical coasts in the past.

For the children he brought two little Indian coats stiff with gold thread, and when they arrived for dessert, the youngsters were adorned and their small heads

crowned from the boxes of crackers.

Sir George pulled them with delight. He loved crackers and had arranged a surprise in the shape of a box that cost five pounds and was rich in useless little ornaments.

He insisted on preserving a festive and liberal atti-

tude to life until New Year's day was come and past; then he rose, on the second of January, to face reality.

Upon the morning of that day, he read the Litany before breakfast, and when the meal was ended, invited his daughters to the study for serious conversation.

"I am too well aware that you have much to say to me, Gertrude," he declared, while moistening his hands in a finger-bowl after his morning orange, "and the time has now come to say it. I am prepared to investigate and arrive at conclusions. Do not for an instant imagine me backward in this duty. We must face and exorcise this transient spirit of discomfort that has brooded over Belmont Lodge for a considerable time."

CHAPTER XVII

GERTRUDE set the case clearly and Sir George was in a vielding and pensive vein. He nodded at each item of the massive indictment.

"One, of course, renders to Cæsar the things that are

Cæsar's," he admitted.

"Or he'll certainly take them, Papa," said Mary. "You must be just before you are generous, Papa," explained Gertrude.

But he was difficult, for he had a trick to fasten on

words and wrest them to his purpose.

"As a man called to administer justice for more than a quarter of a century, I may be allowed to know the significance of the word, my Gerty," he replied. "Never can it be said, or shall it be said, that I failed in that particular. And in my view, 'generosity'—so to call it—is as much a moral duty as the other. Has it ever occurred to you children that generosity is justice? If God, in His mercy, can be generous to us, is it less than our bounden duty to copy His august example and, according to our lights, suffer our blessings to flow over to brighten those less blessed?"

"'According to our lights'—yes, Papa. But if by 'our lights' you mean our income—" began Gertrude; but he held up his hand.

"I do not," he answered. "Our Lights proceed from the Father of Lights; our income from our own industry in my case. Conscience should prompt the receptive spirit to give to all men liberally and upbraid not. However, the problem lies in a nutshell: we are living beyond our means and must retrench accordingly."

"It is just a question whether we can retrench here," explained Gertrude. "We may be able to do so; but it really means a good deal of drawing in if we are to stop at Belmont Lodge. The tradespeople are very kind about it. For the moment something on account_____"

They elaborated a scheme and Sir George approved the details. Thus the dreaded conference passed, and though he felt perfectly satisfied that they had reached wise decisions and should be able to remain at Dawmouth, his daughters knew it to be very doubtful.

"While he has people dependent on him, it will go on," said Cherry; "but if we all went into a tiny house with one servant, he would have fewer openings. He

would also be easier to watch."

As for Sir George, he spoke comfortable words and

declared himself in a hopeful vein.

"Modern man is denied the gift of prophecy," he said on one occasion after dinner; "but, though he cannot speak with divine inspiration of future events, it is a fact that he is often permitted a proleptic glimpse into his own affairs. I have a premonition, loves, that before any farther sacrifice may be demanded of me, I shall find, as Abraham of old, a ram caught in a thicket!"

The expression was cherished by Mary, and she derived a consolation from it denied to her sisters. She often laughed over it in secret.

"I hope the ram will be caught soon," she said sometimes, but only Sir George himself was entertained.

Instead of the ram there came a piece of interesting news from South Africa. Wingate telegraphed that his wife had borne a son.

"As to weight, points, colour of hair and eyes, I can

tell you nothing yet," he wrote later, "but all that matters is that the atom is hearty and healthy, and his mother none the worse for her trouble. You girls can toss up which shall be his God-mother. His name alone has been decided upon. He will be called 'George Wingate Westover,' and I hope he will prove to be a great fruit-grower some day. I am sending a case of extra choice oranges to the governor—also photographs. My father-in-law thinks of going to England in the spring. Wish I could come; but that's impossible. However, if Mary or Cherry would like a jaunt out here, I should love to have her and introduce her to my precious girl—also my precious boy."

Wingate's father was much gratified before this welcome news.

"The race continues," he said, "and it pleases Providence to ensure another generation. The future head of the family must come home to be educated. It would not please me that he should grow up an Africander, with possibly anti-English prejudices, as one so often observes in Colonials. There is a body of public opinion at the Cape of Good Hope which points to perils in the future and, God-fearing though they may be, the Boers entertain no admiration for our beneficent rule."

"Why shouldn't Cherry go out to Wingate for a few months?" asked Mary. "It would be a great adventure for her, and she would be able to tell us such a number of interesting things that Wingate never thinks about."

The very thought set Cherry in a tremor. "It couldn't be afforded," said Gertrude.

"Wingate would pay."

"On the contrary, I should frank Cherry in every

particular," declared Sir George. "We must consider. If she approves the idea, there should be no supreme difficulty. But Wingate is now faced with responsibilities and we must put no tax on him. A great occasion. There are three bottles of champagne left to my certain knowledge, and we shall drink one at dinner."

Three days later Gertrude discovered that her father had sent a hundred guineas to his grandson. She taxed him, and he justified the gift with many words. And then it appeared as though her father's vision had been justified: the ram was caught. In so melancholy a fashion did the boon arrive, however, that its ultimate advantages were entirely forgotten.

Lady Warner succumbed to her ailments and the

family attended her funeral.

The estates returned to her husband's family and she had no large sum to leave. Such as it was, her brothers received it in equal proportions. Her will had not been altered since the death of General Westover and his share, therefore, came to Sir George and the Canon. By a codicil she had revoked a bequest of five hundred pounds made to her nephew Wingate. The reason was recorded: he had slighted her before he left home.

"These little personal touches always look so inconceivably petty after the grandeur of death," sighed

Sir George.

"Aunt Harriet was petty," declared Mary. "What could have been more petty than not to remember Gertrude, who has been such a faithful niece and done her a thousand services?"

"I don't matter. The bright fact is that Papa inherits nearly two thousand pounds," answered

Gertrude.

They discussed this fortunate event.

"I do hope you'll pay off everything now, Papa, and put what is left into some safe security," begged Gertrude.

"One only regrets that one had not been more trusting in the past," he replied. "With my intuition concerning these benefits, I ought to have sent Wingate five hundred guineas instead of one. However, there is always the future. We now stand on firm ground. Our first care must be to design a satisfactory monument to your aunt. Indeed I have not yet done more than sketch the tomb to be erected at Bath over dear Jerome. I must read Sir Thomas Browne—his 'Urn Burial'—once again. There are sublimities in Browne that may well inspire the funeral artist."

At an early hour some few days later Sir George was in his stove-house talking with William Fry. The old gardener fought the usual battle with Spring at this season and to his autumnal mind the struggle became harder every year. He had fallen out with Johnny the previous evening, and his ears still buzzed under the shrill storm of her Indian proverbs against

all gentlemen of his profession.

He voiced his grievances.

"That Miss Johnston be a darned sight too fruitful of words," said William. "She lashes out like they dratted hail-storms, and then a minute after be smiling at you as if there wasn't a hard thought in her beastly old heart. But a man like me can't be talked to that way—not by a woman like her. I don't want her advice, nor yet her scorn."

"Women, William—however, the subject would take too long. As for advice: I have always found that before one takes it, the point to consider is this. How does the man stand who gives it to you? Johnny is amazingly feminine despite her almost male asperity at times; and she has the defects of her qualities. But

the qualities are there: she is an acute creature, William."

Fry shook his head.

"The clever ones don't offer advice where it ain't wanted, I reckon. You mind my friend, Farmer Slocombe? His father was a road-mender and a worthless man. But my friend gave him a home on his fine farm when the old chap was past work. Yet the ancient zany always thought his clever son a born fool. and, to his dying day, poured out advice enough to sink a ship."

Sir George laughed.

"One must keep an open passage between the right ear and the left, William, so that most that we hear from our fellow-creatures may go in at the one and slip easily out at the other. We have the wisdom of God within our reach, and the sense of man is but tinkling brass in comparison. Indeed, the older I grow, the more amazed do I feel that our wits move so slowly."

"Things change for the worse, Sir George, not the better. I see it all round. The men don't work like they used to do, nor yet the women; milk don't cream like it did and the cows don't give so good milk as when I was young. Vegetables ban't half the size they was; and the slugs and snails so big again. Church bells don't ring so sweet, Sir George. Spring's a battle instead of a pleasure, and weeds laugh at you."

"God continues to help those who help themselves, however," argued the elder, but William, in his present mood, was prepared even to deny this time-worn myth.

"He don't, Sir George! I don't care who the man is, but He don't-by this hand He do not! He hinders 'em. I've been trying to help myself for sixtyfive years. And where am I? Still fighting the damn groundsel an' milky dachells!"

"Good employment, good health and a good conscience—these are great privileges, William. Herein is reward enough."

"I ban't saying nothing against 'em. But why, after half a century and more with a bent back, can't I straighten up and watch other folk working—same as

you?"

"That is to open a very large question, William, and one that in a cooler moment you will feel inexpedient. It shows lack of balance, if I may say so, and a faulty sense of proportion. At some other time I will throw light if you desire it. But there is a simple answer. Duty, William—to do our duty in that state of life into which it has pleased Providence to call us. Fear nothing. I am conscious of your faithful service and it shall not go unrewarded. Indeed I design another half-crown on your weekly wages after Easter."

They talked and William grew calmer. Presently he

apologised for his ebullition.

"'Tis that woman fretted me," he said. "I'm a religious man by nature, same as you, Sir George. The General Thanksgiving tells us to thank the Lord for our 'creation, perspiration and all the blessings of this life,' and—""

"'Preservation,' William, not 'perspiration.'"

"Perspiration is preservation, Sir George. 'Tis the sweaty men hold out the longest."

"Not always. Look at me."

"You've lived foreign and had your juices dried up, I expect," ventured William. "You be one of they grasshoppers, Sir George, that can live on the smell of a poached egg."

"On the contrary, William. I am now going to my morning meal and shall very likely eat a poached

egg," declared the other.

They parted and Mr. Fry went to work in a temper

more cheerful. Sir George, too, cherished Fry's last remark.

"William has called me a grasshopper!" he told them at breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE horror of the Bulgarian atrocities troubled not only Sir George Westover, but the rest of the civilised world during the following year. For some time a great melancholy overcast him and it was the fiendish cruelties practised upon his fellow-men that caused it. His intense humanity sometimes clashed with his religious convictions, for the spirits of ruth and reason must ever appeal piteously against things as they are, even though faith affirms that all is for the best.

But Sir George's own affairs were slowly and surely intruding themselves upon him once again, and to his genuine astonishment he found his sister's legacy had swiftly diminished. It was too evident that while he persisted in his present methods of principle and practice, Belmont Lodge could not be supported, and he found himself at last called to choose between altered conduct and a smaller house. Gertrude indicated the problem and before she did so, entertained a correct idea of the probable response.

"Every year brings more urgent demands for charity on all sides," she said to Admiral Ryecroft, on an occasion when she visited him without her father. "One cannot do everything, and yet Papa is powerless

to deny anybody. You know what he is."

"Too well," answered the other. "I've preached to him in season and out with no avail, Gertrude. It is a case of the ruling passion growing stronger as the will grows weaker. Age invariably accentuates our worst points, not our best ones. The weeds remain,

even though the ground cannot produce the old, good

crops. My dear friend wants a sharp reminder."
"I'm afraid he's going to get it," she answered. "I've spoken to Papa and told him that our position is exceedingly serious, and he has quite appreciated the fact and said that he must deny himself the luxury of giving and confine himself jealously to a tithe; but of course he'll forget all about that in a week, and the next of those interminable appeals for the refugees will see him signing another cheque."

"He tells me that he is going to Gloucestershire."

"There again one is in a dilemma. An old friend has died-old Mr. Pomfret. He and his wife were great cronies of Papa's at Bargood, and he is much concerned for the widow. He is going to see her."

"You'll go with him?"

"He doesn't want anybody to go. He makes that quite clear."

"Then of course you can't."

"The one bright thing," she said, "is this: that Papa is beginning himself to see we may not be able to stop at Belmont Lodge. He agrees to retrench and is talking about 'remorseless thrift' again, as he always does at these times; but I think he begins to realise that the garden and the hothouses and the establishment generally are growing a little too much for him. Not for his personal energy. He does all that he has always done; but Fry gets fearfully slow, and Papa says his memory is failing. And last year damped Papa a good deal about growing sub-tropical things."

"All to the good," declared Admiral Ryecroft. "Can't you look round stealthily while he is away?

If you found a smaller property-"

She shook her head.

"I couldn't stand another struggle of this sort. When we move again it must be into quite a small place. I've known for a long time that this ought to happen. It will be far better and braver to face it once for all and find ourselves free of anxiety. For that's the only freedom that matters, Admiral. I loathe being in debt. It is so degrading, and Papa utterly fails to grasp the fact that when he's sending money to the Balkans, he ought to be sending it to the grocer and coal-dealer. His answer is always the same. 'Our local merchants enjoy peace and prosperity; they can wait. But those who stretch their arms to us in the name of the God of Mercy'—and so on."

The admiral comforted her as best he might, and even promised to look for a house himself; but Gertrude pointed out that their new home would not be in

Dawmouth.

"When we do go, we shall make a clean sweep," she said. "I don't think I could live in a little house in a row here—anywhere else gladly; but not here."

"Your father wouldn't mind?"

"Not in the least. A thing like that would never trouble him. He has no pride of that sort; but I'm weaker. I have. We mustn't go too far from you, because you are Papa's first friend and greatest hero; but I'm thinking of Wick Abbot—only ten miles off and a nice quiet place with a good market. Johnny says we don't realise the blessing of a good market. She's beginning to hate all the shop people in Dawmouth. And Wick Abbot has lovely country walks and beautiful woods and just the sort of places Papa likes to poke about in. If he does go up to see Mrs. Pomfret, Mary and I mean to spend a long day there."

"Bear in mind the church, Gertrude," warned her old friend. "Wick Abbot might be all right and not too far off for us to see each other during the few years left to me. But satisfy yourself that there is a church well rooted in the depths of Protestantism:

that's vital. It might actually turn the scale in your favour when the time comes."

"He's worrying about the Pope again a good deal. We called on some new people—a retired civilian and his family—and he finds they are papists."

"The Mannerings—yes. But it is wiser to leave the religious side of our friends' activities alone. Manner-

ing is a distinguished man in his way."

"I'll tell you how things go," she promised, and Admiral Ryecroft, who much admired Gertrude, hoped

for the best and commended her courage.

On returning home, his daughter learned that her father proposed travelling to Gloucester "to order Mrs. Pomfret's affairs." At another time she might have urged him to stop at home and order his own; but for the moment Gertrude rather welcomed the possibilities of his absence. He departed, full of business, and a day later the three sisters spent some hours in a neighbour township and satisfied themselves that Wick Abbot would prove a far cheaper place of residence than Dawmouth.

From their father's point of view they decided that it promised well. The parish church was locked up.

"It always shows they are in the depths if a church is locked up," said Cherry; "and through the windows I can see there are galleries all round it and a great picture of a lion and a unicorn. It ought to be all right."

A house-agent was prepared to give them orders, that they might see various dwellings upon his list, and they learned that for fifty pounds a year the sort of home that Gertrude craved could be secured. The young man who attended to them was particularly assiduous and pleasant. He expressed a hope that, when they desired to consider a house, they would favour him, and pressed his card upon Cherry, who put it into her purse.

He was a tall man with black whiskers and dark, kindly eyes. Cherry perceived that he had admired her, and she studied the card in the train on their way home. She read the words:

"Mr. Arthur Bulstrode.
Auctioneer and Estate-Agent.
Wick Abbot."

"If," she said, "when we do leave Dawmouth, we have a sale, Mr. Bulstrode might be useful to Papa.

He seemed a gentlemanly man.

"There certainly will be a sale," declared Gertrude, "We shall have to plan things on a different scale altogether if we go to Wick Abbot. Scale is everything, and peace of mind appears to be utterly impossible if you live on one scale with means only adapted to another. Papa's mind is quite open and he would soon accustom himself to narrower surroundings, as he did when we came to Belmont Lodge."

"The things he really loves—taking walks and planting seeds and so on—don't depend on your means fortunately," declared Mary. "They are in the power

of anybody."

"What do you think to do, Queenie?" asked Gertrude. "The wrench for him will be parting from you

and the boys."

"It won't amount to parting," explained her sister. "I shall take rooms. I noticed there are lodgings in those nice little houses that run down the side of Courtenay Park. You may find a house not far off, so that we shall all be pretty close together, and I must look about for a little day-school for Charlie and Wilford. There are sure to be plenty."

"As to staff," declared Gertrude, "there will only be Johnny and Sarah and Susan. Then, if there's a garden, and I hope there need not be very much, we can have a man once a week."

"You must try for a garden," urged Mary. "Just a little one. It means so much to him. He'd fret without something."

Two days later Sir George returned. He was in good spirits and declared that Mrs. Pomfret proved

well able to manage for the future.

"She has a new friend since the old days," he explained. "A pleasant and practical person—a Mrs. Fanny Woodley, a widow. They may decide to live together at Cheltenham. I feel no fear for Millicent Pomfret. She takes her bereavement in a Christian spirit and is considerably better off than she expected to be. Poor dear Pomfret had insured his life for a thousand pounds, as an agreeable surprise to her at his decease. The fact fills her with remorse, because, as she told me, she had often puzzled to know how he spent his money—the truth being that considerable sums were called for to pay the premiums. She wept when she considered her baseless suspicions of the past. 'A lesson, my dear Millicent,' I told her, 'a lesson never to suspect anybody of anything!'"

He learned of their visit to Wick Abbot with resignation. Gertrude was tactful and considerate, while Cherry dwelt on the promise offered by the parish church and Mary declared that the river and forest scenery was very attractive and the country walks

promised to be full of interest.

The old man listened and offered no considerable objections. He seemed a good deal pre-occupied at this season and visited Admiral Ryecroft, to learn if it might be possible to sell the remainder of his lease.

"Perfectly possible," declared his friend. "Belmont Lodge might be disposed of on satisfactory terms

at any time. Your landlord will be pleased to relieve you, for the reason that he intends raising the rent to any future tenant."

There came a shock not long afterwards and Sir

George made a confession.

"After dear Harriet's death," he told them, "I cast a certain amount of bread upon the waters—well knowing that it would return to me after many days. I forgot personal obligations for the moment, before those infinitely greater appeals from the refugees of Bulgaria. Complexities may involve a speedier exodus than I had at first designed; but one Lady's Day or Christmas makes no real difference. We must face the necessary discomfiture and hold on our turbans with both hands as the Indians say before bad fortune."

"You mean you would be prepared to go at Christmas, Papa?" asked Gertrude before this revelation.

"Why not? A time, my Gerty, one hardly chooses for such a process; but if you girls can face it, be sure that I can."

"We need not wait till Christmas," said Mary. "We can get everything in train at once and move soon after Michaelmas. The first thing is to take Papa to see Wick Abbot, and if he approves, then we will leave him in peace and go house-hunting in earnest."

Mary sympathised with her father on a future occasion when he took his constitutional with her and the children upon the beach.

"You have so much on your mind," she said.

But he laughed at her.

"When I consider my official career, love, and the immense issues of life and death I was accustomed to handle; when I remember the Mutiny and the prodigious problems of commissariat and the shadow of death under which for a time we all moved—when I

look back at these great matters, my own affairs appear almost absurdly trifling."

"But you were young then," she said.

"I am young now," he answered. "In mind I am still young, for I continue to possess those qualities of optimism and the sanguine outlook we associate with youth. My hope may be clouded by the passage of events; but no untoward incidents involving my own unimportant existence make the least difference. This life, however, is exceedingly precious, and the clergy, who tell us it is merely a preparation for death, err, in my opinion. The thing in itself is magnificent, and I look forward to enjoying many more years of precious service and human companionship with those I have assisted to bring into the world. You and your dear children are among them; and who knows what other human beings may not win something from me vet?"

"Yes, Papa. I believe there are a great many nice

people at Wick Abbot."

"There are nice people everywhere in my experience," he answered. "And we should look on life in terms of our fellow-creatures, Queenie, not in terms of our personal good and evil. It is selfishness that creates half our tribulations, and what follows? That only the unselfish can be said to know the real meaning of happiness. As to money, though eminently desirable under the faulty values of modern civilisation, it is not in the least essential. I read a tale of a man who when pressed to pay considerably more than he possessed, would turn to the Blue Books and ponder over the figures of the National Debt. His own disabilities viewed in the light of these gigantic operations, appeared so ridiculous that peace of mind returned to him, and even a little laughter."

"He was easily amused," said Mary. "But I share

Johnny's opinion. I am indignant that you should be bothered with life when you have done so much to lessen the bothers of other people. Johnny said, 'Bulgarian atrocities indeed! There's atrocities nearer home if you ask me; and for a man like Sir George to be worrited with silly things and prevented by a lot of measly tradesmen and trash from enjoying his life his own way, is a disgrace to the nation!' And so I think, Papa."

He laughed and returned home presently in the best of humours; and when, some days later, Gertrude and Mary departed, to seek the new house, he took Cherry for his afternoon drive. They ascended to Haldon Hills; but on this occasion Sir George was in a pensive

mood.

"It is curious how the personal element creeps in sometimes and distracts us from the grander challenge of nature," he confessed. "The woods and heath, in this magnificent panoply of autumn, are very fine to-day and invite our admiration, for themselves and the eternal beneficence responsible for them; and yet for the life of me, my Cherry, I cannot keep my thoughts from wondering how Gertrude is getting on." "Naturally, dear Papa," she answered. "But I'm sure

she'll be fortunate. Your remarks—about the unimportance of environment—last night cheered Gertrude

a great deal."

"I observed it; but after an unusually good dinner, we sometimes reach a height of philosophy the following morning fails to sustain. There is a thoroughness in Gertrude—an inclination to go beyond the limits of the necessary in inconvenient directions. She is not a pessimist—too brave for that—but I have known her needlessly drastic in facing problems—too inclined to cut a loss, as the saying is. One must always seek, before the sharp challenges of the world, to save as

much as possible from a reverse. In a word, Heaven helps those who help themselves."

"Yes, Papa. And you will be Gertrude's first thought in any case. She will not forget the various

points," answered Cherry.

On the evening of that day his daughters returned, weary but triumphant. They had found a house well adapted to their requirements; and Mary was also fortunate. Excellent accommodation offered at Courtenay Park for herself and her family.

"Was Mr. Bulstrode helpful?" ventured Cherry.

"Very," declared Mary. "He is a dear man and we

already owe him a debt of gratitude."

"'Number 4 St. Paul's Terrace," murmured Sir George. "Imagine St. Paul with a terrace! Not perhaps the direction for correspondence that one would have chosen; but, after all, a man's earthly habitation—are there any horticultural amenities, my loves?"

"Comparatively none, Papa," said Gertrude firmly. "There's a tiny garden in front and a tiny garden behind. A gardener once a week will be all we shall need."

"No glass?"

"A small conservatory leading out of the drawing-room."

He brightened.

"Good! One may then still see the process of life unfold, and plant the seeds of date and orange and so forth."

"Plenty of room for that, Papa, and for pot plants too," promised Mary. "And the garden's not so tiny either, only of course it's over-looked by the neighbours."

"Over-looked?" asked Sir George rather blankly. Then he recollected. "Yes, yes—a terrace, you said. That would involve the propinquity of others. Perhaps our British love of privacy may be pushed too far. Without privacy, however, there can be little

dignity."

"On the contrary, Papa," answered Gertrude, "true dignity should be superior to privacy. We live so much behind walls and hedges in England that we forget this. But Americans and other democratic people think our longing for privacy rather morbid, I believe."

"It may be as you assert," he answered with mildness; "yet for my part I cannot go all the way with you. Consider nature's plan in this matter. What do we find? That only the most commonplace creatures are content with complete publicity and a communal existence. Your starling, your sparrow, your sheep and your buffalo enjoy gregarious conditions and herd together without pride; but your leopard, your tiger, your eagle and the nobler anthropoid apes all choose a retired sphere of life and pursue their activities in seclusion."

"No tiger would ever live in a terrace, I'm sure," murmured Mary.

Sir George, however, was just.

"Not willingly," he admitted; "but it may happen in old age, when their sight grows dim and their powers diminish, that these predatory fellows sometimes feel a desire for companionship and the society of the rising generation. One cannot say. At any rate I should regret to be deprived of my young tigresses in our new den. I will visit the place next week and converse with Mr. Bulstrode."

CHAPTER XIX

SIR GEORGE made a final compromise with his family. He agreed to become a tenant of No. 4 St. Paul's Terrace, Wick Abbot, on one condition: that he should remain at Belmont Lodge for the final flowering of the blue Indian convolvulus and indeed until after Christmas. Gertrude argued against delay, but he would not be turned from his purpose, and feeling that the great main point was gained, she yielded with good grace.

The departure proved a much more elaborate and protracted affair than his daughters had planned, for their hope had been to slip away unobtrusively; but the old man, pointing out that such an exodus would be unseemly, arranged some final entertainments and a little dinner of leave-taking. Meantime, he scheduled his furniture, calculated what must be retained for the new home and what might be dispensed with. estimated the result of the sale in terms of money and declared with elation that a very considerable sum could be counted upon. Gertrude and Johnny between them crushed his figures and cast him down; but then Wingate Westover wrote from Africa and sent his father a cheque for a hundred guineas, to help with the move. He expressed the keenest regret that his father was called to make the change, but felt sure that all would be for the best. He repeated his invitationto Cherry, or Mary—to spend six months at the Cape and see the orange orchards. He also sent a box of fruit which pleased his father well.

His cheque also gratified Sir George extremely. "I shall keep it, as a precious memento of my dear

son's generous affection," he said. "I do not need to

tell you girls that it will not leave my hand."

Though urged to do so, Cherry held back from the momentous business of a visit to South Africa. She gave reasons, but they were not the true ones. Perhaps she scarcely realised her fibs herself, for the sub-conscious mind has a great art to conceal itself under disguises. Its operations startle us and we explain them inaccurately, moved thereto by a mistaken sense of shame.

The final dinner-party was made an occasion of some ceremony. Sir George anticipated nothing but pleasure from this entertainment, but found an emotional element develop among his friends. He was not sentimental about anything that concerned himself, yet swift to feel his heart grow warm, or cold, in connection with others.

Miss Protheroe and Mrs. Baker vied in expressing their regrets at the departure of the Westovers, and the vicar declared that he was losing a parishioner not to be replaced. Sir George turned the subject to politics and strove to awaken enthusiasm in a certain direction.

"On the first of January," he said, "Her Majesty Queen Victoria will be proclaimed Empress of India. The Viceroy will see to it that immense pomp and ceremony accompanies the proclamation. Lord Lytton understands these things as well as Dizzy himself. The appeal to the Asiatic mentality will be stupendous. It is a valuable strategic move in my opinion."

"Doubtless Her Majesty will be much gratified also," said Mr. Gilbert. "I am glad you approve, for you are in a position to know. For myself, I confess, there seems a certain hollowness and unreality about the

affair."

"No, Vicar," declared Sir George. "Under the pomp and circumstance and the imposing business of the function you shall find a reality. This will bring the monarch nearer to the Eastern imagination. There should be heroic statues of Her Majesty set up, for though the Indian mind is opposed to images, it is none the less pervious to the impressions they create. I would have colossal and possibly gilded presentations of Victoria. A monument such as the noble erection to the Prince Consort in Hyde Park would go far to impress upon the native intelligence something of the significance of the Empress of India."

"To trade upon their simplicity is doubtful policy, however," argued Miss Protheroe; and then Admiral Ryecroft fulminated against the representatives of

Ireland and the company agreed with him.

"An infamy—these Irish obstructives—and something should be done about it," he said. "Shall the Mother of Parliaments be at the mercy of these seditious rascals? Shall a Biggar, or a Parnell, destroy all legislative functions and reduce the proceedings of the Lower House to a second Donnybrook Fair? The Speaker is exceedingly to blame in my opinion."

"If it goes on, we shall lose Ireland," declared Miss

Protheroe; but Sir George thought otherwise.

"It would be more correct to say that Ireland will lose us—lose our patience, our good-will and our desire towards friendship and understanding," he told her.

"There is a strain of madness in all Irishmen," said the vicar. "Providence has willed this perversity of character for reasons which our Anglo-Saxon intellect cannot fathom. Had Protestantism conquered, another story might have been told, but out of a nation under the heel of Rome nothing can be expected until it is extricated from that melancholy position."

"The Englishman never knows when he's beaten; the Irishman never knows when he has won," explained Sir George. "That is the curious difference be-

tween them. The Irish are a tactless people, which is remarkable, because they possess a fine sense of humour; and with humour one generally finds tact. But if they suppose that by creating anarchy in our house they will attain to order in their own, they must find themselves mistaken. We English have many faults; but the one thing you cannot do is to frighten us."

"They are a nest of hornets, a horde of pirates, a band of traitors, and should be treated as such," vowed the admiral.

The party passed away to music, and for the last time in Dawmouth did Cherry tinkle at her harp and Gertrude play "Running Waters" on the piano.

After Christmas there began the business of the move; and in this connection did Mr. Bulstrode enter the life of Sir George. He had already created a favourable impression, for on the old man's first visit to Wick Abbot, the house-agent attended him and replied to a thousand inquiries with unfailing clarity and cheerfulness. Before the spectacle of No. 4 St. Paul's Terrace, Sir George fell into temporary silence; but he soon cheered up, pronounced a benediction on his future home and only relapsed during the evening, when he called for the adagio movement of the Symphony.

Then came Arthur Bulstrode to consider the business of the sale and examine the furniture and effects to be relinquished. He struck a note much more sanguine than that of Gertrude or Johnny, and his view so gratified Sir George that he invited Mr. Bulstrode to stay for luncheon. He agreed to do so and sat between Cherry and his host, comporting himself in a

manner to please them all.

"A gracious and reasonable man," declared Sir

George, after the auctioneer's departure. "Out of his large experience he speaks, and there is every reason to believe that our sale will defray all the local charges and leave us with an important margin. There is a larger demand for well-made and massive furniture than you imagined, Gertrude."

"I hope he is right, Papa. He is a man rather prone

to look on the bright side of things."

"And who in his senses would look on any other side, my love? To anticipate disappointment is the worst sort of folly. There is a wise pleasure in being hopeful, for hope in itself is a tonic. Even Bulstrode has tonic qualities. I approve him, and if, in the event, his prophecies are justified, I shall applaud him."

"Johnny thinks the world of him," said Cherry. "He had a very nice and sympathetic touch with her. He saw in a moment that she dearly wanted to keep her big bed with the spring mattress, and he promises that

she shall, because it's no good for the sale."
"If she does," answered Gertrude, "she will have no place to turn round in her bedroom at Wick Abbot.

However, that is her affair."

"A bed," declared Sir George, "means much to the elderly. One gets accustomed to the character, so to speak, of a bed. And if you find a bed to suit you in every respect—a bed that never disappoints you, or plays you false, a bed that becomes a trusty and faithful friend in sickness or health alike, then one is wise to cleave to such a support even at cost of raising minor problems. For consider how much of our time is spent within its embrace, my Gerty. Other articles of furniture receive us fitfully, and see us come and go according to the exigencies of the moment; but to our bed we dedicate nearly one-third of our existence. We come to it weary, we throw ourselves upon it with our armour off and lie unconscious and defenceless within

its protection. And we leap invigorated and refreshed from its companionship, to go upon our way rejoicing when night has passed. Nothing, in fact, is more important on the temporal plane than a bed of quality, of distinction and above suspicion in every way. It is our life's companion, our solace, our consoler. We are usually born upon a bed, and in most cases depart this life upon one. Much might be said to the purpose on this subject; and since her bed has so endeared itself to Johnny, there must be no question of her parting from it."

"Mr. Bulstrode is well-educated and seems to me a very nice man," said Mary, and her father agreed with her, while Cherry listened, concealing certain tremors of secret emotion.

"He is a worthy being," admitted Sir George. "I will go so far as to say that I should not mind admitting him to a measure of intimacy above and beyond our business relations. There grows an inclination among intelligent people to judge of a man by himself rather than his family and social position; and while such a tendency might, of course, be pushed too far and create class confusion—a most undesirable thing—still we must move with the times."

"An auctioneer, Papa?" asked Gertrude.

"I suggest nothing precipitate, my love. But I am disposed to believe that Mr. Bulstrode is one of nature's gentlemen, and think no worse of him for the accident

of his calling."

"He lives with his mother and sister in a large villa outside Wick Abbot, and drives in every morning to his office, for he told me so at lunch," murmured Cherry. "And he's very fond of gardening—a great gardener—especially hybrid tea-roses."

"A gardener shall never find me lacking," promised

Sir George. "But the grand name of 'gardener' is often taken in vain. People—chiefly women I regret to say—glibly call themselves 'great gardeners,' if they possess the power to discriminate between a gloxinia and a geranium, a cabbage and a brussels sprout. There are few 'great gardeners.' They are in fact as rare as any other great persons. We shall see anon if your claim for Mr. Bulstrode can stand, Cherry. He had never eaten a Cape gooseberry before visiting my hothouse after luncheon."

"That's nothing, Papa," argued his daughter. "You may be a very great gardener without eating Cape

gooseberries. Many people hate them."

To the last Johnny fought a fierce battle with the local tradesmen, and unknown to Sir George haggled and wrangled over every item in the storm of bills that seemed at this season to rain upon him. It appeared that a thousand things had been purchased concerning which nobody had any recollection whatever but the seller. Again and again was the old judge bewildered before accounts which put a strain upon his memory. Sooner or later, however, light was thrown over most of these items and he remembered them—often after Johnny had repudiated with a sharp tongue. One tradesman threatened to issue a summons for libel, because Miss Johnston had told him in the hearing of customers that nobody trusts a woman, a crow, a parrot, or an ironmonger. Johnny also outraged the coal merchant in her final interview.

"A low-caste man is like a musk-rat," she said;

"if you smell him, you remember him."

Many were well pleased when the indomitable woman vanished for ever from Dawmouth; while for her part she always declared it to be a grasping and iniquitous place, full of greedy and undeserving persons and over-

rated in every particular. She declared Wick Abbot much to be preferred and prophesied great things of the market.

"I can see honesty looking out of their faces," said Johnny, "-just the same as they can see honesty looking out of mine. But they poulterers of Dawmouth, they hadn't no hope of God, and God hadn't no hope of them."

On the morning before he departed, Sir George bade

farewell to William Fry and his son, Richard.

"Shake hands, men," he said. "I thank you for your service and lament that we must part. May all good attend you, and refer your future masters to me, that I may speak words in your favour."

"And thank you, and the Lord bless your honour," answered William.

CHAPTER XX

The shrill piping of Sir George's flute broke the sleep of several women on the morning after the Westovers arrived at No. 4 St. Paul's Terrace. Gertrude alone was too weary to hear it. She slept heavily through the melody of "Home Sweet Home" that floated tremulously, but defiantly through the little house.

Cherry was awake and she began to weep, for she found herself in a mood very highly strung of late. Familiar but not forgotten experiences were overtaking her, and once again she felt those gentle interests which represented the highest activity possible to Eros within her tender, but uncertain spirit. Others had awakened these shadowy emotions, which sank again to rest and left no wound when the exciting cause was withdrawn; and now, once more, moved the gentle passion in a quarter whence little could be hoped.

For Cherry was aware that Mr. Arthur Bulstrode, the auctioneer, loved her. He had been thrown much into the company of the Westovers during the last debacle, and finding him intelligent, courteous and very understanding, Sir George had reposed complete confidence in him, confided in him and been much invigorated by Mr. Bulstrode's attitude to his embarrassments. The man of business strongly negatived any thought of "bankruptcy," which had hovered like an evil spirit on the tongues of Admiral Ryecroft and Gertrude. The old sailor was of opinion that it would pay his friend to become insolvent and cited various examples of troubled gentlemen in his own profession who had escaped from their difficulties in this manner.

Sir George, however, rebelled against any such cowardly channel of retreat, and when he found that the auctioneer was prepared to submit suggestions likely to be satisfactory to all, the old Indian's heart went out to him.

This Cherry knew; but she also knew that a gulf yawned between Arthur's valuable services and the reward he evidently designed to claim for them. As for herself, she liked Mr. Bulstrode very much. admired his dark eyes and glossy hair, his cultivated voice, his painfully correct pronunciation and his excellent manners. He was always dignified, never subservient, never unduly familiar. He dwelt with his mother and sister in a villa a mile from his office. He was forty years of age, but energetic and athletic. He rode a bicycle with one very large wheel, that came up to his shoulder, and one very small wheel, no larger than a dinner-plate. He admitted that the machine was dangerous going down hills; but he felt no fear, and in his knickerbockers, Norfolk jacket and little round hat, he looked very masculine and attractive to Cherry.

His tact never failed. Before a fortnight had passed at Wick Abbot, meeting Cherry in the main street, he had saluted her with grace and geniality, and asked her whether it would give Sir George pleasure if his mother and sister called upon him. Cherry had not hesitated to say that it would; and she told herself in secret, how upon the result of that visit her future life might depend. She dwelt upon the matter at her private devotions, and was more sanguine than she dared to tell herself; for her father by no means forgot Arthur Bulstrode when the sale was completed and a sub-

stantial sum accrued therefrom.

"The nightmare may be said to have galloped away," he declared one morning at breakfast. "I learn to-day

from Bulstrode that, while scarcely realising his and my expectations, our Dawmouth sale has produced a substantial sum—amply sufficient—amply—to clear us of all encumbrances in that place. He has done well, and as I have taken his advice and propose to hypothecate—to hypothecate, Gertrude—a proportion of my pension to the solution of other outstanding problems—a year, or at the most two, should see us affluent and probably in a position to leave this little dwelling for one which would promise a wider horizon. Bulstrode is a sagacious and far-seeing man. deprecates lawyers, as I do. This generation reposes a feeble-minded trust in them which I have never shared, but which they naturally do their best to foster. People have ceased to enjoy clear vision in this matter. They no longer see; they only feel; and when they begin to feel, it is often too late to escape. Bulstrode and I are seeing men and avoid the pitfalls set for the unwary."

When Arthur's mother and his sister, Clare, called upon Gertrude, they proved in every sense pleasant and amiable. They said little, but listened well, and expressed a hope that the mild air of Wick Abbot would agree with Sir George.

"Madam," he replied, "any air agrees with me, so that it be pure and sweetened by the companionship

of kindly and intelligent fellow-creatures."

He expatiated on the virtues of Mr. Bulstrode and

made it clear that he regarded him as a friend.

Others also called, and the great event of the spring centred about a new acquaintance, who paid a visit one month after their arrival and introduced himself as a great admirer and old friend of Miss Protheroe of Dawmouth.

"Such an introduction, I trust, will make me welcome," he said.

Mr. Walter Bird was very tall and very thin. He wore long grey whiskers, but his head had become exceedingly bald. He dressed to perfection—a perfection rare in Wick Abbot—and he kept a monocle in his right eye at all times. Himself an old civilian, he knew nothing of India, but kept in touch with his former department of the Home Office and found that he saw with Sir George on most political questions.

The conversation becoming gloomy, Mr. Bird

changed it.

"We have, I think, a bond in common," he said, "for though not myself an artist, I am an enthusiastic collector, and I may almost say that pictures are my best friends. My circle here is small and my chief activity and interest, since retirement, is my collection of water-colour drawings by the old English masters in that medium. Since the first moment that my means enabled me to begin collecting, I have done so; and being a painter yourself, Sir George, it may interest you some day to see my examples of the bygone great."

"Nothing would attract me more," declared the listener. "Cox and Turner and so forth. But I

understand Turner is priceless nowadays."

"Not priceless, Sir George. That mighty man painted such a prodigious number of water-colours that they are always to be procured. But expensive certainly, and they tend to grow more so. I am fortunate. I possess no less than two of his works. For these I paid three hundred pounds some five and twenty years ago. To-day they would command at least as much again. Of the immortal Cox I own three examples. I have, also, two De Wints, a Copley Fielding, a Paul Sandby, three Prouts and a great treasure—a Tintern Abbey by Girtin. These are the gems of my collection. You, too, are a painter in water-colour, Sir George?"

"An indifferent amateur," confessed the elder. "My principal works, so to call them, are devoted to Indian subjects. If you will cast your eyes round these walls, Mr. Bird, you will see some of my best achievements. I hope to be painting again this autumn."

The visitor inspected gravely and regarded without emotion the mountains, banyan trees, pagodas and

elephants.

"Most interesting," he said. "Conceived in a large manner, Sir George. Doubtless these efforts bring back India very vividly to your mind?"

"They do; but not so vividly to other people's," confessed the old man. "My dearest friend, Admiral Ryecroft of Dawmouth - he lunches with us next week-always laughs at my pictures and says they look as though they had gone to the wash. But I like restrained colour and temperate effects, even though illuminated by a tropical sun. Violence in art is anathema to me."

Mr. Bird was now regarding the old picture of an English landscape. His eyes had grown bright; his long neck was thrust forward. He stroked his whiskers with both hands.

"My earlier manner," explained Sir George. "My girls keep it and give it a place of honour; but it belongs to the days when I was quite young and had not mastered my medium."

Mr. Bird said nothing; but he studied the drawing with an admiration which he made no effort to restrain.

"We love it," murmured Cherry; "and Papa

always runs it down."

The visitor did not appear to hear her. He turned for a moment to her father, asked a question and then gazed once more upon the drawing.

"Did I understand you to say you painted this work,

Sir George?" he inquired.

"Yes; I'm the culprit, Mr. Bird. Its origin is hidden in the mist of a far past; but I believe I must have painted it for my grandmother about the year 1815, on my first long leave. You admire it?"

"Immensely — immensely," declared the other.
"You must give me the privilege of looking at it again

some fine morning about the hour of noon."

The Westovers felt pleased with Mr. Bird. They paid a return visit, admired his distinguished and representative collection of old English water-colours and learned that he was a bachelor, who lived alone with a cook-housekeeper. His dwelling was small and his life had evidently been simplified to the highest degree. He had built a little gallery for his collection, which opened out of his dining-room; and here it was easy to observe that he spent the greater part of his time. But, though, as he declared, practically a friendless man. Mr. Bird evinced strong desires to better his acquaintance with the new-comers. He was exceedingly urbane, invited Gertrude to pour out tea and had evidently been at some trouble to prepare an ample and inviting meal. He took occasion when Sir George. Cherry and Gertrude were examining the pictures, to speak aside with Mary and divulged some remarkable facts. She found herself immensely interested, but not much surprised.

"I've often thought it must be so," she said. "I'll

break it to Papa, Mr. Bird."

"He ought, I think, to know."
"Of course he ought to know."

Elated by this conversation the new friend took further pains to win their approval, and entirely succeeded. Of his pictures he said no more, but discussed general subjects.

Oxford and Cambridge had just rowed a dead heat in the annual boat-race, and this unusual incident engaged their comments. Then they proceeded to a greater theme, for Russia was about to declare war

upon Turkey.

"By the end of June, they will be over the Danube—the Russians," prophesied Sir George. "This, I may tell you, is no surprise to me, and I find myself largely indifferent so far as the contending parties are concerned. One might be supposed to stand on the side of the Christian legions; but the Muscovite has in no sense assimilated the creed that he professes. As well seek to convert the Russian bear himself. And as for the Turks, I detest and distrust them heart and soul. We pander to them and shall doubtless continue to do so. They appear to have a strange power and put the 'evil eye' upon every British statesman called to face their craft. We are as children in their hands, and a time is coming when we may be called to pay dearly for our futilities and credulity in that quarter."

Mr. Bird proved to have a sense of humour; but his solitary jest failed, for he strove to be entertaining on a topic not suited to any such treatment in the view of

Sir George.

The collector, in answer to some trite and moral

reflection from his guest, expressed doubt.

"I often find it hard to grasp my connection with life in general, and feel still more vague about my relations with the universe," said Mr. Bird. "It is fundamental and, of course, one ought to be able to appreciate how one stands, and so cut a respectable figure—each according to his powers. But I don't feel able to fit myself into any exact niche; and what is worse, I don't seem to care."

The judge shook his head.

"Forgive me, but you err," he declared. "Surely a little reflection would remove your doubts. Nothing should be more clear to a man than his precise position

in the eternal scheme. Only by knowing this can he develop his cosmic sympathies and feel at peace with his own nature. Before all things we must preserve a large sympathy with the cosmos; and the power to do so is denied to none. The cosmos in my opinion needs our sympathy. Providence appears jealous never to leave any ambiguity on such a paramount point, for right living is based upon it. To say, in effect, that you don't know where you are, is a confession of weakness, Mr. Bird."

"I must reform," admitted the other. "I must certainly adjust my cosmic sympathies—a fine phrase that, Sir George—and doubtless then I shall recognise

my exact position."

"And its possibilities, Sir. In my experience, which is vast, I can honestly say that I have found but few men who recognise their possibilities. In some cases this was fortunate, since their possibilities were sinister; but too often we set limits to our well-doing that we possess ample power to pass, had we also ample will."

Sir George found himself in excellent spirits after his tea. He was actually boyish as he walked home with his daughters and once lifted his voice in song. A popular melody of the day had tickled his fancy and

now, with umbrella over shoulder, he sang:

"Says the old Obediah to the young Obediah!"

Only the approach of unknown persons upon the footpath silenced him, and presently, leaving Cherry and Gertrude, he entered Mary's lodgings to see her youngest child. Little George had suffered from an attack of croup, but mended, though he was still in the doctor's hands. He welcomed his grandfather, and when Sir George had shaken a bottle of medicine, extracted the cork and tasted the physic, he took the child upon his knee and let him play with his watch.

Then it was that Mary related particulars of her conversation with the collector.

"Do you know, Papa," she began, "that Mr. Bird wants to buy one of your pictures?"

Her father stared, then he flushed a little.

"Buy one, my Queenie? What does he think I am? A professional painter? I do not sell my works. A tactless suggestion and not quite devoid of offence. You surprise me. I can, of course, paint him something presently, and make him a gift of it for his gallery. I should hardly have supposed him to be that sort of person."

"No, Papa; he didn't mean that. He doesn't want to buy one of your own paintings; but it's rather extraordinary: the picture you always speak of as in your earlier manner, turns out not to be painted by you

at all."

"Not by me?" cried Sir George. "Does he suggest

that I didn't paint it, my darling?"

"He's quite sure you didn't, Papa. Don't think he wasn't exceedingly nice about it. He was charming; but it's clear that when my great grandmother mentioned that as a treasure, she knew all about it. If you ever painted her a picture, I'm afraid it has been lost."

Sir George gazed blankly upon his daughter.

"If I didn't paint it," he asked, "who did? How

should it be possible that Mr. Bird can know?"

"Because it was painted by a very great man indeed, Papa! Or so Mr. Bird thinks. Somebody called John Sell Cotman painted it, about seventy years ago, I think he said. He was born, Mr. Bird believes, in 1780, and made wonderful etchings and pictures, and flourished in Yorkshire and Norfolk and Normandy. And no expert can be in the least doubt about a Cotman, and this is a very fine example of his work."

"You amaze me, Queenie," said Sir George. "I am

to understand that a myth has been exploded. Well, well! Perhaps he will presently discover that my Indian studies are by Buddha!"

"Oh, no, Papa. I'm sure he liked those too."

"Thus self-esteem is apt to receive a sharp reminder," pondered her parent. "Naturally the drawing ceases to have any special significance as an heirloom if I didn't paint it. But is he really sure?"

"Quite sure, Papa. Only the great Cotman could

have painted it."

"Then Gertrude can give it to him," said Sir George.

"We'll convey it to him, Queenie."

"Good gracious, no, Papa! That would never do. It's worth a great deal of money. Mr. Bird was quite clear about that. He merely thought it would interest you to know you had harboured an angel unawares, so to speak. He said nothing about the price. Of course he left that to us, in the event of our being so very kind as to let him have it for his collection."

The old man was elated.

"Good!" he said. "Bird shall acquire it. I feel no sentiment about it now. Gertrude and I have often differed as to where it should be hung, and I can see, of course, that her judgment, though untrained, must have been correct. I shall regard the picture with renewed interest, but from a totally different angle of vision, Queenie."

"Exactly, Papa; and if he offers Gertrude perhaps as much as twenty guineas for it, I hope you'll see your way to let her take it."

"I shall," declared Sir George. "I may add an example of my own work for his collection also."

"I shouldn't, Papa. It would embarrass Mr. Bird. You see he only collects the pictures of dead painters."

Her father laughed heartily.

"I can hardly be called an 'old master' yet!" he said.

CHAPTER XXI

SIR GEORGE, with his customary expedition, soon settled into the cramped conditions of his new home, and preliminary affairs, that Gertrude had hoped would serve to occupy him far into the summer, were composed within six weeks of his arrival. He had sown a large batch of orange pips and date stones; he had engaged a gardener, to work for him once a week, and he had visited the new tradesmen and indicated his requirements in every quarter.

He had also explored the neighbourhood and walked to the places of interest round about. He had ascended the River Dart by steamer from the port to Totnes, he had visited Dartmoor and examined an ancient Roman encampment under pine woods and brake fern

within two miles of his home.

These old earthworks became a favourite excuse for a constitutional. He took his grandsons to see the spot

and explained its interest to them.

Then followed a period during which Gertrude suspected reaction. Her father became a little withdrawn and spent more time among his papers. He was not collating texts, but writing letters; and these letters he posted himself. His eldest daughter debated the mystery with her sisters; but none could form any theory of it.

"Johnny says that Papa has not got enough to do here," explained Cherry. "You see at Dawmouth there were so many interests, and sitting on the Bench and so on, and the vinery and a thousand things. But here, to a man of Papa's tremendous energies, life

is possibly not full enough."

"Papa's life would always be full enough," declared Mary. "He would always take very good care to fill it. I've heard him say that he despised the man or woman who could suffer from ennui in such a world as this."

"Yes; he'd always fill every moment of his time," agreed Gertrude; "but the curious thing is that, for once, he seems to be filling it without telling us exactly

"Why should he tell us?" asked Mary.

"No reason if he doesn't wish to," answered Ger-"But it's unusual: that's all. He usually shares his thoughts and plans with us."

"If he's making plans, he'll be sure to share them when they mature," prophesied Cherry.

She herself had made a prodigious plan, and it may have been consciousness of the secrets in her own heart that prompted her to support Sir George's unknown activities. Cherry had met Arthur Bulstrode on numerous occasions, and she was actually committed to take a walk with him. They were to enter the seclusion of certain woods which offered attractive and sequestered vistas to the north-west of Wick Abbot.

He asked, and she agreed; and two days after her father's affairs had challenged the argument with Gertrude, she set out alone, passed through the streets of the little market town and presently beheld Mr. Bulstrode already at the tryst: a bridge over a spark-

ling but narrow brook.

Cherry was in no doubt as to the ordeal that awaited her. She had gathered from former conversations that Arthur did not intend to ask Sir George's permission. Speaking generally upon the theme of marriage and courtship, he had made it clear that, in his opinion, an understanding between the lover and his lass would be the only thing that really mattered. He showed great originality and independence of mind—so Cherry thought. She agreed with him, but vaguely. Painful experience had shown her that appeal to her father too often ended in disappointment for all concerned. Sir George had never been confronted with an accomplished fact; but his daughter was determined that in this adventure he should be.

She liked Mr. Bulstrode better than she had liked any of her suitors. His occupation did not throw a shadow on her admiration for him. He was handsome, kindly and trustworthy—a man on whom she could depend at all times. His great steadfastness of character had been praised by Sir George. There was a forthright quality in the very tone of his deep and measured voice that inspired absolute confidence. Cherry was proud of herself for attracting him. Her unexpected success in this achievement awoke self-confidence and revealed secrets of personal character that both delighted and alarmed her. Arthur was as a glass which reflected qualities in Cherry hitherto unguessed by herself, or any other.

The romance, while hidden as yet from Sir George, had not escaped Gertrude and Mary. Both knew exceedingly well what their sister was about, and both, respecting Mr. Bulstrode, gradually losing their inherited class prejudice, in the school of reality, were sympathetic to the wooing. But while Mary believed that her father would raise no opposition, Gertrude

judged otherwise.

"There is a vast difference between Mr. Bulstrode as a helpful friend, and as a son-in-law," she declared. "Papa has the very highest opinion of him and realises his admirable qualities, so there may be a chance; but the fact remains, Queenie, that he is an auctioneer." "I believe Papa will rise above that," foretold Mary. "He's frustrated so many of poor Cherry's hopes. Besides, Papa is pretty wily when he likes. To have Mr. Bulstrode for a son-in-law would be a tower of strength."

Gertrude admitted this.

"I only hope it may happen," she said. "Cherry will certainly accept him; but it may be merely done mechanically on her part. She's accepted everybody who offered, as a sort of line of least resistance, knowing, of course, that it rested with Papa to throw out the bill, so to speak, when his turn came."

"In this case she really does care about Arthur Bulstrode. I know the signs," explained Mary. And she was right, for the elderly lovers had not walked above half a mile by streamside when Mr. Bulstrode

offered marriage and was accepted.

"I am forty-one years of age, Miss Westover." began Arthur, "and it may interest you to know that, until we met, I never saw a woman who challenged my affection, or made me feel that she represented a very considerable asset to life. But so it is. In less prosaic terms, I love you, Miss Westover. I love you with genuine devotion. You have made existence an entirely different affair and much enlarged my objective. I feel that to try and make you happy would be a far nobler occupation than any task that I can imagine, and I do honestly believe that it lies within my power to bring an increase of happiness into your life; while on your side I may honestly say that if you could care enough about me to marry me, there is no doubt that my life would become far more important and probably far more successful. In fact you would be a great incentive and inspiration, dear Miss Westover-Cherry, if I may call you so. With you beside me, I should take larger views and grow larger-minded. Not more industrious, for that would be impossible; but more comprehensive and greater in every way. But enough of words. Is it beyond hope that you could consent to be my wife? I am not worthy of such a wonderful woman-my reason tells me that; but love cries out above reason and insists upon being heard."

"You do me a very great honour, Mr. Bulstrode," she answered, "and, as you say, love must be heard. It is a sacred thing—at least I have always felt it to

be so."

"Exceedingly sacred, indeed," said Mr. Bulstrode. "Yes; and all conquering—all conquering. I'm sure one must take it in a religious spirit, if it is to be a success, don't you think? Otherwise—however, I am not at all clever. I feel a great deal drawn to you. These things are in Higher Hands. Yes, I have felt, as we grew to know and understand each other, that you are a man of whom any woman might be proud. And to find that a simple person like myself has succeeded in unconsciously attracting you! It is a great event—a great event in a quiet life, Mr. Bulstrode."

"Call me Arthur-Cherry," he said. "That is if you feel you can make me the happiest of men by

replying in the affirmative."

"It is a turning point—a question that one feels demands such careful weighing. There are your own feelings, which are often too deep for words at such times—'at such a time' I should say. And then there is the feeling of gratitude to the—the lover, who has found one touch his heart: and then one thinks of all the dear ones—Papa and my sisters. And there is duty. One always feels that when a great happiness is offered, it may be a temptation to blind us to duty. I often doubt if I have done my duty as perfectly and thoroughly as I might. Probably I haven't. I am not what you call a strong character. Conscience-"

Mr. Bulstrode ventured to interrupt her melodious

but futile response.

"Everything would fall into its place, dearest, if you felt for me what I feel for you. In a word, do you love me? If you cannot, enough said, and I should feel I had no right to occupy your precious time, or thrust myself upon your society. I love you with all my heart; and for the moment, I'm bound to say the vital and paramount question can be answered briefly. It is whether you love me."

Cherry secretly appreciated this interruption. She much liked the thought of an iron hand in Arthur's

velvet glove.

"You men," she said. "There is a dreadful side

to you."

"Not to me," he answered. "None has ever accused me of a formidable or antagonistic attitude in any of life's complex relations, dearest Cherry. In any case perfect love casts out fear, and if one of us has cause to fear, it is myself, not you. My life, in a manner of speaking, is in your hands, to make, or considerably mar."

"I think I love you, Arthur," she answered. "In fact I'm very nearly positive I do. The feeling I entertain for you can only be called by that sacred

word. But Papa?"

"I couldn't say as to him, Cherry. In any case his approval would be in vain, if it were accompanied by your disapproval. I couldn't submit the proposition to Sir George—could I?—until I knew your mind. When you say that you are very nearly positive, I confess I am discouraged."

"Then I will speak more clearly, Arthur, since you command it. A woman, perhaps, naturally shrinks from pronouncing the final and definite word. Anything final always rather terrifies me. It may be weak,

yet so it is. But I do love you. I have, as a matter of fact, loved you for a long time if the truth must be told; and nobody need be ashamed of telling the truth, need they? For that matter we all of us have the best of reasons for loving you. You have been a noble angel to Papa, and saved him and us much anxiety—not to mention money. But where I am concerned, Papa's view has always been the first consideration. His disapproval would be fatal, Arthur."

"Why should he disapprove? Have you any reason to anticipate such an unfortunate event? Why should Sir George frown on me? Is there a stone of stumbling

concealed from us?"

"None," she answered. "None in the world. Papa seldom frowns on anybody, and he never speaks of you without genuine gratitude and admiration."

Mr. Bulstrode considered.

"I am to understand that he is arbiter?"

"I could not do anything that would give him pain. I never have and never will."

"But you love me, dear Cherry?"

"Yes, dear Arthur, I do, I love you very deeply." He looked round. They were exceedingly alone.

"Kiss me," he said, "and let me kiss you. It is a compact. I venture to believe that the course of true love will run smooth, my treasured partner to be."

She kissed him and with his caress woke into

animation.

"Dear—dear Arthur!" she said. "I'll try so hard

to be a nice little useful wife."

"You will be an adorable wife!" he declared. "Shall I come home with you to tea and tackle Sir George to-night?"

"So soon?"

"Yes, I think so. Uncertainty is really more than I could bear, Cherry."

"I have always rather inclined to uncertainty," she confessed. "It is more restful if you can still feel there are loopholes to anything. But it's a great sign I love you, Arthur, that I feel just as you do. I shouldn't sleep a wink to-night if I didn't know how it was going."

He kept his thoughts to himself and they talked of the future. He looked forward with confidence and

inspired Cherry to do the same.

"Mary and Gertrude will both be on our side, dear Arthur," she said. "But what will your mother think?"

"She will think me the most fortunate man on earth. She loves you only less than I do."

"Dear Mrs. Bulstrode!"

They fell silent presently, both speculating on Cherry's father. Arthur could see no shadow of reason why Sir George should lift objections to the match. having regard for Cherry's age and his own established and satisfactory position; while Cherry, herself, to her own surprise, discovered within her heart an inclination already dawning to question any adverse criticism of Mr. Bulstrode. Looking back she remembered that her father had frustrated earlier romances; but she now found herself far less disposed to yield than on former occasions. The fact rather cheered her, and indirectly it served to convince her that her love for Arthur was on a higher and more steadfast plane than similar emotions of the past. She wanted Arthur and, for the moment, could see no reason why Arthur should be denied her. By instinct and experience she traversed her father's mind and perceived that his fair objections could be reduced to one. He might not consider Mr. Bulstrode socially justified in suggesting such an alliance. "But if perfect love casts out fear, it also casts out nonsense," reflected Cherry. She determined not to let this argument weigh with her, and knew that she would have Mary on her side, if not Gertrude. Sir George had accepted Arthur as a friend apart from all questions of business, and she regarded that as a strong point for argument, were argument demanded.

They returned home together for tea, and during the meal Cherry succeeded in making her eldest sister understand that Mr. Bulstrode desired to be left alone with Sir George. Gertrude perceived without difficulty what had happened, and when she had departed with Cherry, listened sympathetically to the great news.

"I am not surprised," she said. "I have expected this, and for my part I have no objection whatever to make. In these days we must judge people by themselves, not their pedigrees, and I do think Papa begins to realise this too. In fact he has admitted it. You've every right to be hopeful. He likes Mr. Bulstrode and has good reason to do so. He may decline at first, from force of habit where you are concerned; but in this case, I do think you feel deeply about it. You look as though you did."

"I do," vowed Cherry. "This is the greatest affair of my life—far the greatest. The others were as

nothing compared to this."

"Well—everybody's on your side. I won't disguise from you that we women have talked about it, Cherry, for Mr. Bulstrode is far too honest to hide his feelings. Oueenie and I are quite convinced it would be a very happy thing, and Johnny, always practical, approves it, because we should have another bedroom if you were not here. Of course Arthur Bulstrode is a hero of hers already. He's always been so good to her."

"That only leaves Papa, Gertrude; and as you say, even if he says 'no,' I'm not sure whether I should feel

justified in not begging him to think twice about it," said Cherry very bravely. "If all of us working

together couldn't convince Papa-"

"I hope his own feelings will convince him; but one must always remember that he belongs to another generation with different opinions than ours. However, it is part of Papa's greatness that he never becomes a bigot, or a fanatic. My inclination is always to be guarded and cautious with Papa; because he is apt to be so unexpected and even disconcerting to others, like myself, who have no surplus vitality. But Papa has what I believe is called 'life energy' in superabundance. I always think of that text in St. John: 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' He has it far more abundantly than most of us; and it keeps him young and wonderful. Even now—he was eighty-two last May—he looks on ahead in a way I wouldn't dare to do."

looks on ahead in a way I wouldn't dare to do."

"If he looks on ahead," declared Cherry, "he ought to see how dear Arthur may be ever so useful in the

future, not only to me, but all of us."

"I do hope he will recognise that. If he calls you

soon, I think it will be a good sign."

They discussed the great event and Gertrude kissed Cherry, but restrained her from an inclination to weep.

"Be calm," she urged. "Keep your wits about you. You yourself may be the deciding factor presently."

To be a deciding factor of any problem was a thought that made her sister the more perturbed by reason of its extraordinary novelty.

"After all love is love, isn't it?" she asked.

"It is," replied Gertrude. "And it must make you

brave, my sweet."

As she spoke a bell rang and presently Miss Johnston appeared to say that Sir George would like to speak to Miss Cherry in the dining-room. She braced herself

therefore, dried her moist eyes and went to the ordeal strung up to fight for Arthur strenuously, should the occasion demand it.

But any such unusual effort was not demanded. One glance at the face of Arthur showed that he laboured under no sense of frustrated hopes. He was calm but evidently elated, while as for Sir George, he embraced his daughter with utmost affection upon her entrance, kissed her and congratulated her with warmth upon the great and happy news.

"It is enough, my Cherry, that not only do I sanction your engagement with Mr. Bulstrode, but heartily approve it," he began. "I rejoice to share your united joy; I record that in my opinion kindly Providence has ordered this attachment, and I welcome Arthur as

another son with heartfelt gratification."

"Oh, Papa, I'm so glad-so very thankful about it

all," murmured Cherry.

"And I share your emotion, my dear child," answered Sir George. "Where is Gertrude? She must

not be absent at this great hour."

Gertrude swiftly appeared and Mr. Bulstrode, in ignorance of the perils that had beset his path, received her earnest congratulations. If she was surprised at her father's pleasure, she did not show it. She perceived that Sir George had raised no opposition whatever; indeed she was already aware of the fact before she joined him, for Johnny, who had brought the message, remained with her mistress after Cherry departed. The old woman had been acutely conscious of the situation and known at a glance that all was well.

"He's consented," she told Gertrude. "Sir George was glittering through his glasses and in the best of spirits, and Mr. Bulstrode looked proud as Punch. Miss Cherry have gone off at last—and a very nice

man too—solid and full of sense. Not a gentleman; but we must hush that up."

"Quite a gentleman, Johnny! Never dare to say he

isn't to anybody."

"Not me. The quality often have to trust to that sort when they're in a mess. I never met a usefuller sort of man. The very one for Miss Cherry, because his word will be her law, and she never was a thinker, and she'll be the ivy to his oak; and one less in this house is going to a God-send."

Then Sir George had called Gertrude to share the family rejoicing; and an hour later, when Cherry and her future husband were gone to see Mary, the old man

spoke with his eldest daughter.

"I hope you share my opinion that this is a blessed ordinance and can only make for good, my Gerty," he said. "As I get older it is more and more borne in upon me that to lift barriers of class against the promptings of youthful hearts must always be dangerous and a vain thing."

"I've long thought so, Papa."

"And in this case, when the two young persons seem so exactly suited to each other, and affection is founded on a fairly lengthy experience, it would, I submit, have been ill-advised to dwell on minor questions and so forth. An estate-agent is after all a man of certain social standing; and when we consider our exceptional Arthur himself, as an individual, the most austere critic could hardly find any reasonable cause for offence."

"Far from it, Papa. And Cherry really does love him with an amount of energy that is a very good sign. And he adores her."

"He spoke of the autumn," said Sir George, "the early autumn. For my part I see no objection."

"None, Papa."

"By God's blessing she will not be separated from us either. For she will, of course, take up her life in Arthur's home."

"Mrs. Bulstrode has the greatest affection for her," declared Gertrude.

"Well she may have; well she may have," he answered. "Our Cherry is a girl who only needs to be known to be appreciated. A fine nature—placid and self-restrained. Thus do all things work together for good."

CHAPTER XXII

GERTRUDE came to see Mary on a morning when Charles and Wilford were at their little day-school. The mother was busy at her sewing and listened while Gertrude talked.

"One sees comparatively nothing of Cherry now-adays," explained the elder. "It has made a wonderful difference. You would hardly suppose that betrothal could alter character, yet Cherry is certainly stronger-minded and less foggy about things in general since she became engaged. Papa wants to take her to London for a fortnight, to make purchases for her; and you know what that means. I have protested that it is not at all necessary and pointed out that some visits to Exeter would meet the case; but though she knows my views, she supports Papa—openly! Of course she is escaping, so to speak, and will soon be beyond the reach of our problems; but I shall not be. I feel it rather selfish of Cherry."

"Not selfish—only self-absorbed. This is such a tremendous thing for her. To get engaged often makes a woman take herself more seriously than she did before; because it argues one is more important and interesting than one thought. And often the most modest of us rather lose our heads on finding a man wants us. That will change when girls are educated as thoroughly as boys; but Cherry belongs to the older generation; and to find Arthur putting her before anything else in the world has rather upset her balance."

Miss Westover nodded.

"I suppose that is so. It seems absurd that dear Cherry should suddenly labour under a sense of her own importance. One fears at times she is almost light-headed. I hope Arthur won't notice it. It is not as though she were a girl. However, we must make allowances, and it's rather Papa's fault in a way. The thing is a mystery to me. He exalts dear Cherry, as though she had done something abnormal, and has accepted Arthur Bulstrode with almost needless enthusiasm."

"It shows how large-minded he is. So few people conquer prejudices at his age. He has found out that Arthur had a great-uncle who was an arch-deacon. He heard it through Arthur's mother, and it fortified him tremendously. Then the business of the Cotman did him a great deal of good. To find that Mr. Bird was prepared to give two hundred guineas for it delighted and gratified Papa enormously."

"I know it did; but if he had sent the picture to Christie's, he might have sold it for two hundred and

fifty guineas."

"Yes; Mr. Bird was frank enough to tell him so; but what did Papa say? He said that 'a Bird in the hand was worth two in the bush' and closed at once. Poor old dear—I like to think he's got a little pocketmoney again. It was your money really; but he never realised that."

"Another mystery," said Gertrude. "What's he

doing with it?"

"He'll spend it on Cherry's trousseau, or some grand

wedding gift."

"I'm not so sure. Papa's puzzling me—strictly between ourselves. Though for that matter it isn't between ourselves, because Johnny's noticed it too."

"Papa puzzling anybody!"

"Well; I believe he's interested in something that he hasn't told us. One wouldn't, of course, dare to say that Papa is secretive, but I think he grows a little evasive. He has now a great deal more time on his hands than of old; but I had hoped, at his age, that painting and growing seeds and the newspaper and his constitutionals and my music would be enough. It looks, however, as though they were not. He's less interested in politics than of old and he writes long letters in his study and doesn't leave them in the box to be posted as he used to do, but strolls out and posts them himself."

Mary laughed.

"His life is narrowed here, and with his immense energy no doubt he refuses to let it be narrowed. He hasn't got enough to occupy his mind, and you know

how he must be busy."

"Johnny thinks the same. In her blunt and rather coarse way, she said a few days ago that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. I was very much annoyed and asked her how she dared to speak so; but she implied it was only a figure of speech. One knew what she meant. She added that Papa received frequent letters in a feminine hand. Johnny is extraordinarily offensive sometimes, but nobody can doubt her intelligence. I spoke pretty sharply all the same. Backstairs gossip of this kind makes me feel that I want a bath to be clean again. But the fact remains: Papa has developed interests which he is denying me—and I suppose you also. He has not enough to do, and is evidently finding something to do."

"Think nothing of it," urged Mary. "There's an atmosphere of romance about us all just now. Cherry's affair has created this, and you know how father's spirit always responds to the smallest shadow of romance. The great thing is that he is exceedingly

happy just now and amazingly well. Papa's health depends a good deal on how things are going. If he is cast down, he immediately begins to feel twinges and aches and pains; but the moment the clouds roll by, he is all right again."

"There is a cloud coming—however, I need not worry you with that. Where's Georgie? Let us take

him for a walk in the Park."

They went out with the child presently and strolled towards the school where a widowed lady took classes of small boys. Then Charles and Wilford appeared, and having seen them home again, Gertrude returned to her father. An unpleasant duty lay before her involving Sarah, the housemaid.

Of Sarah Sir George thought well. He regarded her, not only as an invaluable machine, but also as a person of steadfast outlook upon life. He was now

to be undeceived.

After the mid-day meal upon this occasion it became necessary to divulge certain facts, and since Cherry was spending her day with the Bulstrodes and going afterwards to the local flower-show with them, Ger-

trude felt the opportunity must be accepted.

"Papa," she said, when the luncheon was ended and Johnny had gone from the room, "I have something exceedingly painful to tell you about Sarah. It has been a great grief to me and to Johnny. Nobody else knows it except, of course, Sarah herself and—the wretched man."

Her father started and dropped his silver knife and fork upon a banana, of which he had eaten half.

"Sarah and a man, my love! Don't tell me that

she designs to leave us."

"It isn't what she designs, Papa. It is what must happen. Sarah is with child."

Sir George's blue eyes grew round.

"Sarah!" he whispered.

"Yes, indeed, Papa. I don't know what the world's

coming to."

He frowned and reflected. He sighed and uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "Tchut! This is very inconvenient," he said at length. "Far worse, indeed, than inconvenient. A sorry and unexpected lapse, my Gerty. Sarah—it is difficult to recognise this disaster with my absolute confidence in that quarter. I have thought Sarah one of my successes. Are you sure?"

"She is sure, Papa."

"This must be righted, if circumstances permit of it.

Who is the male sinner, Gertrude?"

"The milkman, Papa," she answered in a melancholy voice. Then, to her surprise and indignation, Sir George burst into hearty laughter. His amusement slowly subsided into a giggle, while his daughter regarded him with obvious pain.

"Papa!" she said, "how can you?"

He gasped, shook still with waning mirth, dried his

eyes and apologised.

"Forgive me, forgive me, dear Gerty. I stand corrected. I am sorry—contrite. My sense of humour was never worse displayed. But so often a human disaster, calling only for condemnation and denunciation too, presents to our weak minds a grotesque side, which blinds us to its gravity and peril. That a soul should be endangered is certainly no matter for laughter, and I indeed blush to have laughed. I was undignified—laughter is always undignified. But the milkman—oh, Gertrude, the milkman!"

"I cannot share your amusement, Papa."

"Naturally not, my love. You are too well balanced. I will see Sarah at a later hour. She shall stop after prayers to-night, when my risible faculties are in better control. To think that poor hop pole of a Palfryman,

with his melancholy morning yelp and high shoulders and flat, anxious face, should have had leisure, or inclination, to commit such evil! There seems to be—what shall we say?—something erotic in the atmosphere of Wick Abbot."

After prayers, Sarah remained and, at Sir George's wish, Gertrude did the like.

The old man was now subdued and had reflected on the situation.

He spoke with kindness and little asperity. He, who in the past had thundered at Sarah for visiting a Roman Catholic chapel, now considered her state

without indignation.

"Sarah," he said, "it appears that you have sinned and, as often happens in these cases, the guiltless are called to suffer with the guilty. We lose you, Sarah; you have deprived us of services that were greatly valued and put upon your mistress the tiresome necessity to seek a new housemaid. But far worse than that. You have chosen to be responsible for a soul, Sarah. Your aberration results in a human life, concerning whose destinies only our Creator can know how great they may be. In the case of your child to be born, it becomes you to see that the guiltless party does not suffer—if suffering can be avoided for it.

"Do not think I feel harsh, resentful, or malignant faced with this story, Sarah, for I do not. Our Saviour has spoken golden words on the subject, as on all others, and He directs that only those without sin shall cast the first stone. Think not for a moment that I am without sin. I—even I, Sarah, in the days of

my youth-"

"Papa!" murmured Gertrude, who was sitting with her back turned to the culprit.

"My love?" he asked.

"It is not necessary, is it, to-to-?"

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "There is no particular reason why I should confide in you, Sarah; though you have done wisely to confide in me. What are the facts? You are about to become a mother, and Amos Palfryman is about to become a father. That is understood?"

"He's the father—yes, Sir; and he don't deny it for

a moment. He's a lot put about, Sir George."

"Well he may be—well he may be! But let us examine further. Palfryman loves you? You love Palfryman?"

"Very much indeed, Sir. We was drawn from the first. I got very much addicted to Mr. Palfryman, and

he got very much addicted to me."

"Then, why in the name of religion and fine feeling, did he not court you like a gentleman, offer for your hand, Sarah, and let his affection take a proper and dignified course? And how came it about that you—a fine and self-respecting woman—could act clean contrary from your traditions and education and Faith?"

"I don't know, Sir George. Your feelings run away with you, Sir. He can't afford to marry—Amos can't—and you catch yourself in a reckless temper sometimes if you're a girl; and if you be in a reckless temper along with the man at the fatal moment—and him reckless too—it happens. And God's my judge, if Mr. Palfryman had half-a-crown a week more than what he have got, he'd have offered for me all suent and proper. But there's his old father—a bedlier, Sir George, and not a penny saved, and Amos has got to keep him, and Mr. Pierce, the dairyman, won't put another penny on his money; and Mr. Pierce says if he axes for a rise again, he'll be dismissed. And there it is."

Sarah began to weep.

"Sit down upon that chair and compose yourself and listen," directed the old judge. "It is exceedingly true, Sarah, that half-a-crown a week has made or marred a great many potential unions. A rise of half-a-crown a week has determined many thousands of our humbler fellow-countrymen to take a wife. The population of the British Isles depends far more largely than the official mind imagines on the question of half-a-crown a week. So now light begins to stream in upon our darkness. Palfryman will, I doubt not, readily understand that it is better to receive half-a-crown a week, than be mulcted of that sum. And that is what the Law will soon exact of him. Too often—too often, as a Justice of the Peace, Sarah, have I been called upon to make the requisition.

"All, then, must happen consonantly to reason and to justice for the unborn. I will give Amos Palfryman half-a-crown a week; and it is understood that next Sunday, at the parish church, I shall hear your banns called out with the milkman. For the rest pray on your knees, Sarah, that it will please your Maker to forgive you a very lamentable error; and direct your future husband to do the same. Also tell him to wait

upon me at the first moment his leisure allows."

The girl rose and stared at him, red-eyed. Her

bosom heaved.

"God bless you—Sir George—that's the prayer what I'll pray to my dying day," she whispered. And then she went out.

Her master shook his head when she was gone.

"How easy—how easy to modify the miseries of the proletariat, had we only the will, Gertrude! To think that, for thirty pieces of copper, the advent of a human soul may be adjusted and the new-comer take his place with human welcome and respect, instead of emerging

into an indifferent world, unwanted, unloved—nullius filius—nobody's child—nobody's child but God's."

"You have done well, Papa, to think kindly of

them," answered Gertrude.

"If a long life doesn't teach you to think kindly of all men—one has lived it in vain," he declared.

CHAPTER XXIII

SIR GEORGE called one morning for his daughter, Mary,

that they might go among the shops together.

"I prefer," he said, "to shop with you, Queenie, for you have larger ideas than Gertrude, or Cherry. In the case of dear Gertrude, I have, I fear, somewhat broken her spirit where money is concerned. under present restricted circumstances she manifests uneasiness, and the price of the Cotman has not cheered her."

"That's because she doesn't know what you are planning to do with the money, Papa." answered his daughter.

He laughed.

"I desire to spend some upon myself," he said.

"Wonders never cease! I'm sure Gertrude will be delighted to hear that. She tells me that you have been mysterious of late."

Again he laughed.

"An excellent but an innocent mystery," he declared. "Such doubt as I may have created in Gertrude's mind will resolve itself at no distant date. There are some things---" He broke off and Mary shook her head.

"Papa—you are being very sly! You have got

something up your sleeve, as Johnny says."
"I have," he confessed. "I have got something exceedingly significant up my sleeve, dear Queenie. How significant I am tempted to tell you, but it will be better that I should not. Then you will escape any

feminine prompting to tell it again. For the moment it is not desirable that Gertrude, or even Cherry, should know. I cannot be absolutely sure myself and, in a certain event, the whole affair falls to the ground. For the moment Gerty is at peace. She has discovered that I design a considerable wedding present for poor Sarah, when she marries the milkman next week. The fact distressed her. She held it not a case for anything lavish. She has ceased to admire Sarah. I have therefore abandoned my original intention without a murmur. Sarah's gift will be a tea-service secured at very moderate expenditure, and a five-pound note for the grotesque fellow she is marrying. His half-crown a week is also assured."

"More than enough surely."

"Nothing one can ever do for our fellow-creatures is more than enough, Queenie. However, as I say, Gertrude is at peace, and Johnny has found a domestic in whom she feels inclined to repose confidence. The present argument—pursued in private between dear Gertrude and myself—is my wedding gift for Cherry. I say 'a hundred guineas'; Gertrude inclines to fifty."

"I agree with Gertrude, Papa. Arthur knows that you ought not to do more. The wedding will cost a

good deal of money."

"A wedding is a wedding," said Sir George.

He fell silent and sighed.

"It is curious," he continued, "how little things bulk large. I have found myself lamenting that Cherry's harp will soon cease to adorn our drawing-room. You might suppose the fact that Cherry will soon cease to adorn it herself is a far greater matter; and so indeed it is; but the disappearance of that inanimate and tuneful object impresses itself upon me. I can see Cherry gone to a happy home without more than natural sorrow; but when I think of her instru-

ment gone, I feel a poignant but unreasonable regret. I continually find myself saying, from 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' these affecting words:

"'And tuned, to please a peasant's ear, The harp the king had loved to hear.'

Not that Arthur is a peasant, or that I am a king; but he doesn't care for music. I believe he is rather jealous of the harp!"

"A man in love is jealous of everything, Papa. That will soon cure itself. Arthur is not a bit jealous by

nature."

"When the 'grand' was sold and our 'cottage' piano substituted, I felt it," confessed her father. "But to that I am accustomed, and Gertrude's excellent touch remains; but the harp—"

"You will often hear it. The Bulstrodes adore you."

But he shook his head.

"To hear and see it as a visitor—not the same

thing."

Then they entered a toyshop, for it was the birth-day of Sir George's eldest grandson; presents were demanded for Charlie, and he and his brothers were coming to a birthday tea at No. 4 St. Paul's Terrace later in the day.

Sir George purchased a bag of marbles, a 'parlour

game' and a bow and arrows.

"Charles must have a picture book also," he said, "and I shall need to see a selection before I choose. I note an ingredient of imagination in little Charles. All children possess it, until it is crushed out of them by their parents, who generally have none. But it should be fostered, not discouraged."

"Charlie loves reading stories."

"Long may he do so."

The purchases completed, father and daughter went

their several ways until the afternoon. Then some hours were spent together to the satisfaction of all concerned. This was a great tea, after which Sir George played the flute. He then joined in a game of marbles and was sorry when the entertainment came to an end. His elation and high spirits continued for the rest of that day and he insisted on the most cheerful strains for harp and piano after dinner.

"I must hear the harp as often as may be, for a

time is coming when I shall not hear it," he said.

Events hastened forward with dizzy speed at this season and, under cover of the preparations for his daughter's wedding, Sir George pursued a private way, unaware that he had created suspicion in various hearts. Politics ceased to interest him at this period and indeed he considered their trend was tame, the results of the session trifling.

"A barren year, a pitiful fruition," he declared. The Colorado beetle had been reported from Ireland, and this interested him considerably more than governmental measures. He held the threatened scourge to be a direct design of Providence to punish the distress-

ful country for its superstition and disloyalty.

Then came the wedding day and Sir George entrusted Cherry to the keeping of Arthur Bulstrode. He insisted on a wedding breakfast, and as many guests were invited as could find room at the diningtable. The bride was married in white; Miss Bulstrode and a young friend were bridesmaids; while Charlie and Wilford performed the part of pages. A physician acted as best man. He was an old friend of the bridegroom. Another doctor also attended the wedding, for at Sir George's special wish, his eldest son, James Westover, came to see him professionally and spent two days at Wick Abbot. James, by some trick of atavism, looked like an Oriental. He was a gentle, brown

man with wonderful eyes and a kindly nature. He felt affection for his father and found himself able to give an excellent report of the judge's health.

The guest of honour was Admiral Ryecroft, who insisted on coming to the wedding and gave Cherry a cheque for twenty-five guineas. A fine day dawned

for the ceremony and all went very well.

Sir George spoke briefly after the breakfast and toasted bride and bridegroom in the old-fashioned way; while the best man proposed the ladies with guarded pleasantries. Charles and Wilford tasted a pineapple for the first time in their lives, and were not disappointed.

"Is it as good as you thought it would be, Charlie?"

asked his mother while she wiped his mouth.

"Almost," he answered. "And you, Wilford?"

"Better," replied the more contented youth.

Arthur and Cherry drove to the station and caught an afternoon train to London. They proposed to spend a week there and then proceed to Paris and the Italian lakes. Arthur's business would not demand his return until September. Thus Cherry, the shadowy, vanished from her old home, and life went on without her. Happy letters came—full of scenery and Arthur. Sir George valued them.

"Marriage has improved our Cherry's diction," he said. "There are charming touches here. But they must have little imagination who are not inspired to a poetic flourish when endeavouring to describe Maggiore. Though it is considerably more than half a century since I saw it, I entertain the liveliest impres-

sions of the lake."

Before Cherry came home, her father announced his intention to take a brief holiday. He was evasive and abstracted at this season and continued to write letters

which he posted himself. A phase of solemnity clouded his outlook. He jested more rarely than usual and

was a good deal concerned with his Bibles.

"And where do you propose to go, Papa?" asked Gertrude. "Shall you want me to come with you, or Mary? The children are having holidays, as you know, and she cannot easily leave them, but I could look after them for a few days."

"I design to be away at least a month," he answered, "and I go alone, my Gerty. Circumstances tend to make that the wiser course; and when I return, I shall insist upon it that you take a good holiday yourself. There are many in London and elsewhere who long to entertain you, when you give them an opportunity."

"Indeed I want no holidays. I am happier at home."

"I shall insist on change of air. As for myself, I visit Thomas, but shall not stop at the vicarage over Sunday, because his Sabbath activities pain me. He is about to retire, and it is time. I then proceed to Cheltenham. Dear Millicent Pomfret has extended the kindest invitation to join her and her friend Mrs. Fanny Woodley. They live together now and have, I believe, much in common. Estimable women both."

"And then, Papa? You ought to go to a bracing place for a time. Cheltenham is not bracing, I believe."

"Happily thought upon," he answered. "I shall consider it at a later date. Malvern possibly, or a few days in the Highlands. And there is always London—

a place that suits me amazingly well."

It appeared that Sir George was making unusual preparations for his holiday. Parcels came and to Johnny fell the task of opening them. They astonished her, but she kept her own counsel until a day when a new grey frock-coat and trousers and three new white waistcoats arrived from the tailor's.

She related the event to Gertrude.

"So all's out and my worst fears come true," said Miss Johnston.

"What on earth do you mean?" asked her mistress. "Of course Sir George would have new clothes for a

holiday. He always does."

"Poor lamb! You don't see—you don't see! Then God forbid I should tell you," answered Johnny; and Gertrude pressed for an explanation, but the elder declined to offer it.

"I may be wrong and, be it as it will, you and me ain't the sort to meet trouble half-way," she said. "I've stood by him five and fifty years, and nobody

shan't fright me away."

Sir George issued many directions before his departure and begged Gertrude to water his plants and consider his various interests. He started cheerful and resolute, and laughed at Mary and Gertrude, who saw him off. His last act was to hand them a letter from Cherry which he had received that morning.

"All is well with them," he said, "and Arthur and she propose to spend a week at Geneva on the way home. They will return before I do. Be sure to welcome them; and Cherry's harp can now be moved from the drawing-room and taken to the Bulstrodes. My forthcoming distractions will help me not to miss it

when I am back again."

"I would give a good deal to know what Papa's 'forthcoming distractions' are going to be," said Gertrude as the train steamed out. "Will he never reach an age when the need for distractions is over?"

But Mary threw no light. She shared Miss Johnston's suspicions, yet hesitated to whisper them in Gertrude's ear. For if the thing happened, it looked as though her elder sister's life work might end suddenly and her life's sacrifice be in a measure wasted. The thought made Mary pensive and anxious.

"Bring the children to tea to-night," begged Gertrude. "I shall feel lost. I don't think I've ever been all alone before. And I dread Johnny. She is full of dark, veiled sayings and concealed tribulations."

"Johnny loves to make your flesh creep, like the fat boy in 'Pickwick,'" answered her sister. she can look ahead in some weird way. Only she never looks far enough. She sees changes and begins to shout before she's hurt. Most people do. But often changes are so splendid that we soon wonder however we got on without them. Think of a time before telegrams!"

Ten days passed and the Bulstrodes returned home. Cherry was radiant and Arthur delighted to go back to business. Gertrude clung to her sister's happiness and strove to regain a peace of mind that had departed in the train with Sir George; but the consciousness that something was hanging over the home could not be evaded and Johnny took care that the cloud should not lift.

Sir George wrote at last—a letter which Gertrude read at her lonely breakfast, and concerning which Johnny strove hard to learn the contents, but won no immediate confidence.

When her shattered meal was ended, Miss Westover put on bonnet and cloak and went to see Mary. The latter expressed no great surprise, but abundant sympathy. Then she too donned a hat, and the sisters took their father's letter to Cherry. To her the news came with the force of absolute novelty, and she grew a little hysterical before it. Thus had Sir George written:

> "The Pines Hotel. Bournemouth.

My DEAREST GERTRUDE. You will be surprised to learn that I am sojourning at this seaside resort; but such astonishment as this fact may awaken must be as nothing before the stupendous and happy news I now convey to you and dear Cherry and Mary. (For Cherry, as I think, will have returned with her husband from the Continent before you receive this letter.) In a word, my love, I have married again, and the object of my affection, though as yet unknown to you, will soon return with me to win a welcome your warm and loving heart must be the last to deny her.

You will recollect certain allusions to a Mrs. Fanny Woodley—a widow who joined forces with Millicent Pomfret at Cheltenham. From the occasion of our first meeting last year, I found myself singularly drawn to this engaging and talented woman. Her refinement, her distinction and her aplomb made the most direct appeal to me, and I was gratified to observe from the first that I possessed a quality of mind and thought and an outlook upon life and its obligations that created considerable im-

pression on Fanny.

We have corresponded frankly and fully for many months; and the result of this epistolary exchange has been the revelation that each in the other finds a complement of character and a promise of the most precious sympathy and reciprocal support. She is the relict of a colliery official in South Wales, and is, needless to say, a gentlewoman in the highest and purest meaning of that word. Her age approximates to sixty, though the beneficence of Nature would lead you to suppose her many

years younger.

I know that this is going to startle all my dear ones not a little; but I am bold to believe that surprise will merge in delight and heartfelt congratulations when they reflect upon the great step I have taken. Change, dear Gerty, is the order of the Universe: movement, action and reaction keep the world sweet, and only the static can become stagnant. To move with the times at eighty-two years of age may argue a touch of inspiration, and both Fanny and Millicent are good enough to say so; but they add that 'eighty-two' is merely a figure of speech in my case, and

since happiness undoubtedly tends to make us younger, we may leave the merely mathematical details of my age to look after themselves. These mean considerations are not for us.

It is pleasant and human to be called 'George' again, and to feel a sweet and understanding woman completely in my confidence. She has that rarest gift: common sense. When I told her of my custom—to dwell with the Scriptures in various languages—and, at such moments to be inaccessible to all, she approved highly and declared that there was nothing like getting away from your fellow-creatures sometimes, and giving both their nerves and your own a complete rest. How true!

Needless to say Fanny already thinks with affection about all three of you, and has said many kind things of Wingate also. That he will share your gratification at my

great news I feel no doubt whatever.

For the moment there seems little to add. I will write to Johnston concerning certain domestic details. Thanks to our thoughtful Cherry, there will remain ample accommodation for our needs. That we may expand at some future time into a larger residence is still, of course, my intention.

On Friday fortnight we design to return, and my dear wife wants you all to call her 'Fanny' without ceremony and nonsense. That is obviously the proper course, and I beg you will take it. Bournemouth proves to be a sanatorium for the consumptive and really no place for hale and hearty people like ourselves. We go to Scotland to-

morrow.

Good-bye, my dear daughters. If one thing could make me more contented with my lot than I already am, it would be the knowledge that my happiness is making each and all of you happier, and that you will to-morrow be rejoicing with me at a good fortune so infinitely superior to anything I have deserved.

God's blessings are like Himself—above our understanding. We can only thank Him for them and strive to be worthy of His generous mercy according to our poor

powers.

Fanny joins me in affectionate greetings to you all. She is, by the way, an accomplished musician and sings old English melodies with perfect taste and feeling. Gertrude will, I hope, often accompany her. Her voice is a con-

tralto of considerable power.

With pardonable feminine curiosity I can see you all longing to know what manner of person your dear stepmother may be. We have so far agreed to gratify that curiosity as to be photographed together by a local artist; and if I find the proofs of his skill to justify the gift, I shall send each of you a finished portrait after seeing the 'proofs.'

You are ever in my thoughts and my love goes out to all.
Your affectionate father,

GEORGE WESTOVER."

"Do you suppose he has gone mad?" asked Cherry, staring at her sisters; but they found no evidence of aberration.

"To think of anybody calling Papa 'George,'" she murmured. "It seems almost indelicate; and yet he says he likes it."

Cherry read the letter a second time, while Gertrude

and Mary talked. She interrupted them.

"Whatever does Papa mean, when he says she is 'a gentlewoman in the highest and purest meaning of the word'?"

"That she isn't," replied Mary. "Naturally he wouldn't have mentioned the subject if she had been. In fact Papa is decidedly defiant. He always says the best form of offence is attack. He attacks!"

"She's not a lady, for the reason that no lady would have married a man of that age," declared Gertrude. "We must face facts. It's intolerable and rather heartrending—perhaps worse for me than either of you girls can guess—but one sees without difficulty what has happened. She has married him for the pension of a judge's widow. That is a very consider-

able sum. She has invested in Papa for the ultimate reward."

"Nobody called 'Fanny Woodley' could be much," said Cherry. "Shall you kiss her when she arrives, Gertrude?"

But Gertrude was moved. She suffered from deeper agitation than either of the others.

"Oh, don't ask silly questions," she answered, rather

sharply, and Cherry subsided.

They talked together and Mary strove to take a

hopeful view.

"We must not judge her without seeing her and realising what sort she is. We must remember that Papa, even though he is eighty-two, has a great power of attracting elderly and quite nice women. Many old people marry in a most dignified way, and Papa couldn't be anything but dignified. His judgment is quite sound too. It isn't as if he'd escaped—so to say—and evaded us and——"

"Pardon me, Queenie—that's just exactly what he did do," declared Gertrude. "He did escape; and he has been evasive for a long time. He knew as well as he knew anything, that this must give us—especially me—pain. However, I quite admit it is idle to lament now. The thing is done, and we must keep our self-respect and show this woman what we are. Friction of any kind is out of the question."

"She may be a tower of strength," said Mary. "I can easily picture a woman of sixty years old or so, being quite a nice and helpful addition to Papa's life; and if she has tact and good sense—as he says she has—we may find that what seems rather terrible is really

a most happy circumstance."

"That is impossible," replied Gertrude. "From our point of view, nothing but unhappiness can attend such an intrusion—at any rate I speak for myself; but I

shall certainly hide that unhappiness and do what I take to be my duty to Papa. Whether he's done his duty to me is a question for his own conscience. We must not be feeble about it. We have our side—especially myself. This was an act that—however, nobody is going to hear me say another word."

Cherry spoke again. Her mind ran on minor details,

which she saw with wonderful clearness.

"When she meets Johnny!" she whispered.

"She and Johnston may suit one another exceedingly well," answered Mary. "Try to take a large view, my dear, and a hopeful view."

Mrs. Bulstrode nodded.

"We've got to think of Gertrude," she said. "It's easy for you and me to be large-minded and hopeful, because we shan't be there. It's dear Gertrude I'm

thinking about, who will still be there."

"Whether I shall remain there, or shall not remain, will depend on many things," answered her elder sister. "If Papa wants me and I find that I can add to his happiness by stopping, I shall stop, whether Lady Westover wishes me to do so or not. But if the position becomes untenable and I cannot minister to Papa any more, then I shall go."

"Where?" asked Cherry.

"It will be time to decide my movements if that becomes necessary," her sister replied. "At this moment I feel like going home and packing up before luncheon. But, of course, we must all face our duty. Papa's the first thought."

"If anything is certain, it is that he'll want you to

stop," foretold Mary.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE mental attitude of his daughters to the marriage of Sir George differed very widely. Her customary self-command, while it restrained Gertrude's passionate resentment from display, could not extinguish her emotion; for she felt that her father's action reflected directly upon her. Gradually she withdrew her annovance from him and bestowed it upon herself: and then, logically proving that the fault was in no sense hers, again she regarded his unexpected step as a wrong and a personal slight. She had surely done all that a daughter might do. She had sacrificed every other interest the world was capable of providing, that she might devote her full energies to him; and yet he had evidently found her quite unequal to filling the void created by the new dispensation. She had failed at the very moment when success seemed assured.

In some moods Gertrude found herself much pained. She felt that not only her own dignity was shadowed, but her father's. That any man should seek to marry again at eighty-two years of age struck her as tiresome and unpleasant. Sir George had done a deed both selfish and unworthy of his character and record. Thus she regarded it. He had wounded his eldest daughter and was much too sagacious not to know it. He had been devious, for he had permitted nobody to argue on the subject, preferring to present his family with a fact accomplished. From indignant thoughts of him, she turned to her coming step-mother and found it hard to forgive any woman capable of such a step.

Indeed she presently forgave Sir George and began to admit that her own short-comings might have led him to seek stronger support. But from the new Lady West-over she already turned with indignation. From her maiden attitude she judged, as a maiden in judgment is usually wont to do. She found it difficult to allow any sort of extenuating circumstances; but then very sanely reminded herself that her father would not be specially concerned with her opinions. Only her attitude to the new Lady Westover was likely to interest him. She had often heard him say that the opinions of the rising generation were exceedingly unimportant.

"The young lack all necessary experience whereon to build opinions," he once told Gertrude. "Let them traffic in ideas, and keep opinions for a time when they shall have acquired knowledge and experience sufficient

to form them."

As to her reception of the wedded pair, the aggrieved daughter was not in two minds. That would be a question of breeding, clearly, and admit of no alternative courses. She must offer the hand of friendship and receive her father's wife in a manner becoming. She was Sir George's eldest daughter, and the fact that he had married again did not alter her obligations to him. She came gradually to grow calm and regard the situation in patience and without prejudice. Indeed a circumstance tended to hasten this attitude, for another person exhibited such violent object lessons at this crisis that Gertrude was fain to take the higher line, if only as an example.

Johnny viewed the future with utmost concern and permitted herself a latitude of language her mistress strove in vain to check. She had a theory that Sir George was trapped and would come home the melancholy victim of a designing and horrible woman. She

pictured him already on a chain.

"A beggar," she said, "—a creature without a penny, as have snapped him for his title and his position. And she'll squeeze him like an orange, and ruin us, and hurry him to an early grave for the pension. The widow winds like a serpent into the empty

heart, and her kiss is poison."

"You mustn't say or think such things," answered Gertrude. "You are leaving Sir George himself out of your calculations, Johnny. He is no ordinary man and he would not have offered his hand to any ordinary woman. To speak of such a man as my father being trapped is ridiculous. If I don't criticise, I cannot think how you dare to do so. We must keep open minds, Johnny, and trust Papa to have done wisely. It is not as though he were one who had revealed any signs of weakness. His mind is clear. He stands firmly and we know his marvellous judgment."

"'Tis just them that think they stand are always the first to fall before a widow," answered Johnny. "Haven't I seen it? They widows have got a power denied to us unmarried women—a gift of Satan that conquers the cleverest men. Better a barren field than a widow. They set their baits for the godly, and the high-minded are the first to fall to 'em. And now the murder's out and you can see why he let Miss Cherry marry an auctioneer. He wanted her room. I always

knew there was something dark hid there."

"Johnny, you shall not say such horrible things!" cried Gertrude. "You must take higher views of life,

as I try to do."

Miss Johnston would not be comforted, and against her unconcealed hatred of the coming change, Gertrude was powerless to adopt any other attitude than one of opposition. To sympathise would have been fatal.

As for Cherry, as Bulstrode's wife she felt nothing but wonder mingled with inner thankfulness that she now stood safely beyond reach of this tremendous complication. She pitied Gertrude heartily, but after hearing her husband upon the subject, abated her concern. Arthur held that the future alone must determine whether Sir George had done well or ill. He, too, declared an acute sympathy with the principal sufferer—indeed he had speech with her and frankly admitted that from her angle of vision the advent of a wife for her father must be painful and disappointing; but he counselled patience. Lady Westover, though in no case could she be absolved of selfishness and worldliness, might yet prove a woman with valuable and helpful characteristics. So hoped Arthur.

"You must remember," he said, "that age sits lightly as a garment upon Sir George. In your own experience you have known many elderly ladies captivated by his extraordinary charm of manner and his gracious and genial qualities. It is quite possible that a widow of sixty years old might care for him and still be quite a nice woman. It is a case for hoping for the best, Gertrude, and basing that hope on Sir George himself. I have a presentiment that we may all be agreeably disappointed. In any case, you know how completely you can rely upon me to do everything in

my power for the best."

Mary echoed Mr. Bulstrode's opinions. She was helpful and her gift of humour bore fruit. She felt deeply concerned for Gertrude; but expressed a confident and honest assurance that reality would prove

far happier than anticipation.

"I don't know why I feel it, but I do," declared Mary. "The sort of women who care for Papa are generally rather pleasant and kindly; and Papa is far too intelligent to be merely caught by a crafty person only interested in his pension and not in himself. He would spot a thing like that quickly. Fanny may turn

out to be perfectly endurable. No doubt she is thinking quite as much about us as we are about her. And Papa has a very just mind and loves us all devotedly. I am positive, if he thought he was doing anything that could fairly be resented by his daughters, he would never have done it. The heirlooms and so on will most certainly go to Wingate in due course; and the family pictures and everything. Papa can be absolutely trusted in such things; and if she's what I hope, Fanny will understand and perhaps show distinguished feelings and realise our point of view and respect it."

With ultimate resignation and, as she told herself, in a religious spirit, Gertrude waited for her father to return. She wrote to him an affectionate letter, in which no shadow of her own emotional trials appeared, and

both Mary and Cherry did the like.

"This will please Fanny a great deal and set her mind at rest," explained Sir George's youngest daughter. "And the more hopeful she feels, the better will it be for Papa. And as soon as we know the best, I'll write to Wingate. If he can afford to do it, it might be a very good thing for him to come home next summer and see Fanny and create a favourable impression upon her. Of course we cannot disguise from ourselves that she will have great power with Papa."

Anon the married pair returned, and his daughters awaited Sir George in the drawing-room of No. 4 St.

Paul's Terrace.

"It is not a case for meeting them at the railway station," explained Gertrude. "Papa would prefer

that we greeted her in privacy."

The hour arrived, and the three women stood silent, waiting for a cab to draw up at the little entrance. Tea was ready and Johnny fluttered up and down the passage in her black, with a new elaborate cap and a muslin apron.

Then Cherry, sitting at the window, spoke.

"Gertrude," she said, "they have come. There are two cabs—the second evidently carries the luggage."

All went to the door as Sir George, in his new grey frock-coat, emerged briskly from the foremost vehicle and handed out his wife. She was clad in dark maroon and appeared to be built on a generous pattern.

"One of them pillowy women," whispered Johnny to herself, where she peeped from behind the sisters.

There was no apparent artifice about Lady Westover. Her grey hair and her high-coloured complexion, her round body, frank smile and not very agreeable voice were all natural. She was not plain, and her dark eyes and full firm mouth indicated character. Her expression was kindly and she greeted her step-daughters without any affectation or sentiment. She shook hands with each and declared her pleasure at knowing them all at last. She spoke through her nose somewhat, and proved not a great talker. Indeed her first speech in her new home was the longest she was ever heard to make.

It was uttered after the first introductions, when Mary and Cherry had taken their father to drink a cup of tea, for which he declared himself in grave need. Then Lady Westover delayed and addressed herself to Gertrude.

"My dear," she said, "listen. And what I tell you, you can tell the others another time. I want you to know that I love your father exceedingly, or I would not have married him. I weighed it up and saw very well what you women would say; but I hoped to be able to put that right when we met. I don't expect any of you to be very friendly to-day, or to-morrow; but I think you will be in six months. I love Sir George—for himself, Gertrude. That is the truth and not at all surprising, for who wouldn't? I'm sixty-

two, though he won't believe it; and he's not a day more than seventy-two at heart and in constitution. A very wonderfully preserved man. I don't pretend that I should have married him for affection only, because I have got to look ahead, and if he'd not been able to promise me some sort of sufficiency in the future. I couldn't have given myself the pleasure of taking this step. I won't pretend anything about that. I wanted to marry again, if I could find a man to respect, who would care for me. I'm an understanding woman and a useful sort. But I never thought to meet a man I could really love at my time of life. However, I did, and I won't dwell on that, because actions speak better than words and you'll see-both by your father's happiness and my line of conduct—that I do love him.

"I'm poor, Gertrude—only a hundred and fifty pounds a year of my own. That is three thousand pounds—safe. Very likely Sir George will outlive me. If he doesn't, I shall have a judge's widow's pension. That won't hurt you, or your pension. I shan't touch anything else but the money. He understands that. I'm not your class exactly; but I've always been a climber in a dignified way and made my friends of the best people I could reach to. I've watched and I've learned, and I'm one of the quiet ones, because silence covers more sins than charity under certain circumstances. That's all I wanted to say; and you'll never hear such a long speech again."

"Nothing could be clearer. I thank you, Fanny,"

answered Gertrude.

At this moment Johnny called them to tea and Miss Westover introduced her.

"This is our life-long and faithful friend, Johnston, of whom Papa has doubtless spoken," she said.

Johnny, with watchful and unfriendly eyes, gave the

ghost of a curtsey; but the new-comer extended her hand.

"I feel as if I knew you quite well already," announced Lady Westover.

"She has a very warm corner in all our hearts," declared Gertrude.

At tea Sir George was both cheerful and voluble. He spoke of himself and his wife as though they had been united for many years. He abounded in their amusing experiences. The photographs were so unsatisfactory that he had ordered no more and destroyed the proofs.

"They made Fanny look a hundred, and me fiveand-forty," he told them. "And yet one hears an absurd phrase that the camera cannot lie. It is obviously a most untruthful instrument even in skilled hands."

Lady Westover addressed her husband as "George." The word uttered nasally suggested the grunt of a kindly pig. She was tactful and inquired concerning the interests of each step-daughter. She asked after Mary's children and Cherry's husband and Gertrude's various activities. She hoped that Wingate might soon be in a position to return home and pay his family a visit. She revealed a sense of humour, which won Mary but made the others suspicious.

Johnny presently took her new mistress upstairs, and when alone with his daughters, Sir George made no allusion to past perfidies, but discussed Lady Westover with enthusiasm.

"Like myself, she hates fuss and formality," he said. "There is a marvellous parity of opinion on every important question between Fanny and myself; and since, thank God, you dear ones all think much as I do, it goes without saying, I believe, that the new life will be, if possible, more beautiful than the old. We

have flowed together like two placid rivers, without trepidation, commotion, or turmoil, but in dignity and devotion. Such a thing was not to have been predicted for me, but Providence has seen fit to confer this privilege upon my grey hairs. As for you, dear loves, the extent of my good fortune will be better appreciated when you know Fanny and have had opportunity to acquaint yourselves with her many-sided genius. Common sense and uncommon sensibility are her special qualities of distinction. Though she was never a mother, she loves children; though never well-to-do, she understands money and has a clear head for figures and a fixed determination never to pay sixpence where fivepence meets the case. This will prove a revelation in itself to all of you. She is rich in feminine virtues, which you share with her, and she comes to you in the full trust and confidence that you will take her as you find her. That is her own modest phrase and I cannot better it. Indeed I feel that you begin to value her already, and friendship must swiftly ripen into enthusiasm, as it did in my own case."

"We are all going to love her very much, if she will

let us, Papa," said Mary.

"She craves your affection," he answered. "It is essential to the perfect rounding and orbicular completeness of my marriage, that she should have everybody's devotion, Queenie. To deny it would be contrary to nature, and the possibility never clouded our honeymoon for an instant."

CHAPTER XXV

LADY WESTOVER was a woman of character and, as such, speedily impressed her personality upon the family into which she had entered. Gertrude summed her up accurately enough on the occasion of private

speech with Mary.

"If a person has no nonsense about them, you know where you are," she said; "and whether you like anybody, or whether you do not, the fact that you know exactly where you are with them is always such a blessing. With most people, you can never honestly say that you know where you are. Generally it doesn't matter and, perhaps, a vague sort of friendly feeling is enough with acquaintance as a rule. But with Fanny, she saw in a moment there must be nothing vague. The position is too intimate. She found that I was frank, and as soon as she discovered that, she became the same. She is naturally frank. And mutual frankness has induced us both to lay down our arms."

"I like her because, as you say, there is no humbug about her," explained Mary. "It was business in a way—her marrying Papa—but it really was a pleasure also. She said so from the first, and time has proved

she spoke the truth."

"It has," admitted her sister. "Fanny loves Papa. She couldn't pretend in a matter like that, because, we, who love him ourselves, should find it out instantly."

"Love is subtle," replied Mary. "It is woven into thought and action. It dominates the hardest nature and abounds in surprises. Fanny often surprises me in her attitude to Papa. She echoes things—beautiful things—that used to happen to me, when dear Charles was alive to love me. And she echoes things that I feel every hour for my boys. We love Papa; but we love him differently from Fanny. Her love for him is a very fine thing. In fact Papa's jolly lucky."

"He is certainly exceedingly happy."

"He is. And we must be happy, because he is. Fanny is a clever woman—more practical than we are. She has a touch. She will straighten things out and save you an immense deal of trouble. A wife has powers over a husband that not even such a daughter as you have been possesses, Gertrude. You mustn't grudge her those powers. As a matter of fact they will save you a great deal of bother and anxiety."

"She always said she was a woman of action, rather

than a woman of words," admitted Gertrude.

"She is. But a splendid listener."

"And a genius in the matter of figures. I could forgive her almost anything for taking over the accounts; but indeed there's nothing to forgive. She has an uncanny way of knowing just the points about her I don't like. Then she regrets them herself and, of course, makes one feel so dreadfully small; because the things I don't like are so small themselves."

"She's rather great in a way," declared Mary. "She's great in the same way that Johnny is great, only on a

higher plane. How do they get on?"

"Better. Johnny put up a fierce fight at first and at present she's feeling the bitterness of the defeated; but as soon as that has passed, I believe Johnston will become a convert. She was immensely pleased at the way Fanny handled the tradesmen. Fanny understands their bent of mind in a fashion I never have been able to do. She says little, but seems to confound every

evasion and excuse before it is uttered. I've shopped with her, and the moment she speaks, you see an expression come over the shopman's face, which shows in a moment that he has grasped the grim fact he is

dealing with a greater than himself."

"She's a clever woman, with just the cleverness you want in Papa's case," summed up Mary. "I like her. I'd like anybody who knew how to make Papa happy. She knows where to concentrate and have her own way; and her own way's right. She said a very deep thing to me only two days ago, 'If you don't feel strongly about a subject, then it's always policy to agree with those that do,' she told me. 'It makes them amiable and the more inclined to let you have your own way where and when you wish to have it.'"

"That's why she goes to church, and is devout about family prayers, and shares Papa's suspicion of the Pope," added Gertrude. "She doesn't feel in the least deeply about religion really, but allows Papa to be her guide in all such matters. Several times she has advised him to spend an hour or two with his Bibles, when he wasn't thinking of them. And she's always quite right. They act as a sedative for Papa, when he

gets excited and too full of plans."

Thus did Lady Westover, without much of guile, but inspired by native shrewdness and good sense, establish her position. Her own predilections gradually appeared. She loved cooking and took great pleasure in the perfection of the kitchen arrangements. She applauded Johnny's astounding cleanliness and sat at her feet in the matter of Indian dishes. For the rest she sang and delighted to do so. Her voice had nothing to commend it. She much enjoyed an evening's entertainment and often went to such small travelling companies as performed at Wick Abbot. Sir George did not join her on these occasions, nor did Gertrude; but Lady

Westover found an unexpected ally in Mary's eldest son.

Charles was an unattractive child with a large mouth, small grey eyes and a peevish expression. He did not make friends and the attention of his family centred on his brothers, who were handsome and vivacious boys; but his step-grandmother found the little lad possessed of some dim yearning towards art, and though of art she knew and cared nothing, this trait drew her to Charles

"He likes a bit of fun," she said to Sir George, "and

none of the rest of you do."

Thus she opened for the boy his first glimpses into another world and upon the days that she took him with her, to some entertainment of singing, or acting, or a travelling panorama, Charles lived in ecstasy.

His mother was puzzled.

"Imagine a Bertram caring about such things!" she said to Gertrude; "but I bless Fanny all the same. Charlie has been a little fiend for the last fortnight and Miss Wilkins, who keeps the school, says she begins to doubt if she can let him stop. But since Fanny took him to see the marionettes, he has turned over a new leaf."

"Papa has noticed it too," answered Gertrude. "He is very fond of Charles; but he says there is some strange perversion of character in him. He is not a Westover. Fanny's dreadful entertainments appear to have just the good effect on Charles that churchgoing ought to have—and doesn't. But, of course, he's only a child."

"It's the only child-like thing about Fanny—her love for these shows," declared her sister; "but they do cheer her up in some way. I don't believe the performances themselves please her much; but it's the anticipation.

She loves what she calls a 'jaunt.'"

On a day in winter, Charles, moved by a sudden desire to reward Lady Westover for her goodness, visited a nurseryman to buy a little plant for her. He was well-known at this establishment, for many of his pennies were spent there; but another and a greater being than Charles also frequented the greenhouses and gardens of Mr. Fuller. Noah Fuller had long become a crony of Sir George himself. He was an old man and a keen horticulturist, and his new customer he had already lifted into a hero.

Thus it happened that Charles, sixpence in hand and good wishes for his step-grandmother in his heart, fell in with Sir George and announced his worthy purpose. Instantly the old man declared gratification, and the child, disappointed that he might not hunt for a sixpenny plant in peace, grew happier to learn that his grandfather was prepared to add another sixpence, or

if need be a shilling to the purchase.

"We are well met, Charlie," he said. "This shall be a combined gift, and united we may accomplish something more considerable for your dear grandmother than you could do alone. She loves a cactus, because they give so little trouble and do not require much water. I, too, love a cactus, and it happens that Mr. Fuller has an excellent specimen in flower at this moment. Why it should be flowering now I cannot say; but it is. Come and see it and decide if I am right and you would like to make it your gift. I shall then carry you home to luncheon with us, and you may present the cactus in person. But first run back and tell mama you are engaged to me."

The cactus was duly purchased; and from that time Charles not seldom appeared unbidden at his grandfather's table about the luncheon hour. He always met a welcome and insisted upon sitting beside his

patroness.

The winter passed without event and Sir George, whose exercise in the open air became tactfully restricted by his wife, spent much leisure with his seedlings and raised innumerable orange trees and date palms. These he pressed upon Mr. Fuller, who accepted them. Many pictures were also painted and Lady Westover often sat with him and worked while he produced the faded Indian landscapes—the pagoda, the elephant and the banyan tree—again and yet again. After dinner, Lady Westover sang, Gertrude played the piano and Mary not seldom came in for an hour, when her boys were gone to bed.

In the early spring a national misfortune depressed Sir George and made him melancholy for many days. The "Eurydice" went down off the Isle of Wight with all hands, and the old man would hear nothing but the adagio movement for his Symphony for several weeks.

until Gertrude declined to play it any longer.

"They're all in Heaven now, George," said Lady Westover through her nose. "Do remember that."

He specially resented the futile attempts to raise the

wreck.

"Let the grand fellows repose in peace within their proper mausoleum beneath the waves," he said; and Admiral Ryecroft, who came to luncheon on a day in April, agreed with him.

The admiral approved of Lady Westover and, with

his usual frankness, told her so.

"When my dear friend plunged again, I own I was anxious for him," he said; "but we have all lived to see his genius justified once more."

He pledged them during the course of the meal and praised Lady Westover to her husband afterwards.

"A prize, my dear fellow—undoubtedly a prize," declared the admiral. "Blessed be the man who hath to his spouse a silent woman."

"Right, as you always are, Ryecroft," replied the elder. "Silence in women may, and sometimes will, conceal doubtful activities; but in my Fanny's case there is never anything to hide save benevolence and sagacity."

"A peaceful woman. Mark me: she will lengthen

your life," prophesied the sailor.

"As to that I cannot say; but she certainly lengthens my purse, which is more important," replied Sir George. "Under that unassuming brow is a mastery of all pertaining to figures."

"And the girls like her?"

"Emphatically. A certain nervousness, which I need not conceal from you, I did undoubtedly experience before taking this step. That I was right I knew naturally; but that they would think me right I could not be so sure. From unguarded words in the mouth of dear Cherry, I have reason to suspect Gertrude did not at one time feel pleased; but that was before she met her step-mother. Now the case is altered and to Fanny's financial talent alone Gertrude would have capitulated. But they are the best of friends, as two such women were bound to be. They enjoy many high qualities in common, though, of course, Fanny, with her wider knowledge of the world, is the wiser woman."

"You are a very fortunate fellow," boomed Admiral Ryecroft, "-one great and deservedly favoured by

Providence."

They declared a common indignation of Russia, which nation had declined the mediation of England between herself and the defeated Turk.

"Our hereditary enemies will not trust us—judging

others by themselves," said Sir George.
"They think that when thieves fall out, honest men may come by their own," asserted his friend; "but they are savages both, and for my part I would have no truck with either."

"It will be necessary," answered the elder. "The enlightened nations—Germany and ourselves—must perforce compose this quarrel and re-order Europe. No doubt Italy and France will seek to put in an oar, after the pushing Latin fashion; but the scales and sword of Justice are in our hands, where alone they may be safely trusted."

"The Sultan, however, was right to seek our protection," replied Admiral Ryecroft. "The peace which appears to be suggested, contains very disquieting clauses that we cannot be expected to sustain. Bulgaria to be a principality, Roumania and Servia to enjoy

absolute independence. This will never do."

"For once we can drop a tear for the Ottoman," answered the old Indian. "The bear has squeezed the fight out of him for some time and, after all, the wretch has some engaging qualities; while Russia has none."

"And what of the Budget?" asked Admiral Ryecroft. "A pitiful performance, my dear friend-a pitiful performance! Northcote stands confessed as the second-class man I always thought him to be. Worse: he is pusillanimous. A duty on dogs and tobacco, and twopence added to the insufferable tax on incomes! These are impositions at once monstrous and mean!"

"Crucial times—crucial times," sighed the sailor.
"The times are always crucial ever since I can re-

member them," replied his companion. "When I went to India, as a lad at the beginning of this century, they were crucial; and so they will always remain. It is the dynamic and explosive elements in humanity that breed and sustain our unrest; and not until Faith has triumphed and the world is dominated by the Christian spirit, can any static condition be hoped for."

"Most true," replied Admiral Ryecroft. "Most true, Westover."

With time Gertrude confessed to herself that her step-mother, at their first meeting, had stated nothing less than the reality. Looking back she marvelled at the flow of words that attended the preliminary conversation with Lady Westover; for never again had Fanny spoken at such length or even alluded to the same subjects; but that she honestly and even devoutly loved Sir George, their united lives revealed with increasing clarity. She not only loved him, but was exceedingly proud of him. She felt also quietly proud of herself for having won him.

"He makes us all seem shadows," said Fanny to

Mr. Bulstrode, who agreed with her.

CHAPTER XXVI

On a day in summer Sir George sat behind his Bibles; but his head was raised and his thoughts traversed a far past. Some accident of conversation at breakfast had awakened the echo of memories that now reverberated through many a vanished year. He had turned out a little despatch box, of which the key was long since lost, and he could only say concerning the contents that it contained old letters covering the days of his early duties in India.

"There is nothing in it of a private nature," he said. "Probably it holds little more than official memoranda and some of the entertaining letters in Babu-English

written by natives."

He had given Lady Westover and Gertrude permission to let a locksmith open it; and while in another room the women inspected these ancient and faded things, Sir George, his mind inspired thereto, forgot the collation of texts and reflected upon early passages in his career. His thoughts turned upon his wives. He summoned Laura, whom he had married at fiveand-twenty-a fair and blue-eyed maiden who died within a month of reaching India, and whose loss had caused him long months of very bitter grief. He could taste the sorrow again after more than half a century: again see her living and dead; again remember the tomb that he had raised over her dust in the cemetery of Madras. Three years later he had wedded Claire and suffered again, for she died at the birth of her first child and was buried with the stillborn boy. Her he remembered not so keenly; for with her death Sir George's recollection was darkly clouded by his own passionate resentment at that loss. He had cursed God when Claire died. He never forgot it, and a plea for pardon had been part of his morning and evening prayer since his lapse.

He thought of the Indian girl, whom he had called "Miranda." With her he had lived during ten years, yet for subtle causes, this union had never much disturbed his conscience, or awakened any very deep

emotions of remorse.

After she died, and during long leave at home, he married again, with Gertrude, the mother of his son and daughters. She was fifteen years younger than he—a woman of great good sense, who had been the object of his devotion for thirty years. His daughter, Gertrude, kept her mother's memory green and he told himself that Gertrude grew daily more like her in countenance and character. And now, twelve years after that supreme bereavement, he found himself married again, and happily once more.

His emotion was one of gratitude to God at a fortune so extraordinary. He sighed, lifted a wordless prayer of thanksgiving, adjusted his spectacles and was about to resume his task, when Fanny entered carry-

ing a withered document.

She was excited, and since excitement but seldom suffused Lady Westover's florid countenance, her

husband felt surprise.

"What on earth have you found, my Fanny, to amuse you among my parchments?" he asked, and she handed him an old letter. He regarded it and laughed, but did not share her satisfaction. Then he read it aloud.

"March 27, 1811.

DEAR LORD MINTO,

I am particularly desired by a very old friend, to recommend to your notice the bearer of this letter, Mr. George Westover, who is going immediately as a Writer to Madras, that I hope you will not think me unreasonably troublesome. He is very well spoken of. I trust therefore that you will not find him in any way troublesome, and that you will show him such civilities as are usual in such cases.

Believe me,
Very Affly yours,
G. CORNWALL."

"A holograph letter from the Duke, who was afterwards George IV," explained the old man. "As Prince Regent he wrote to his friend, Lord Minto, on my behalf, Fanny; and His Excellency returned the note to me, suspecting that I should value it."

"'Value it!" I should think so," answered Lady

"'Value it!' I should think so," answered Lady Westover. "How could you hide it away like that?

Royalty! It's an heirloom."

"Of little worth, as are most heirlooms, my love."

But his wife thought not.

"A King is a King-even though he's dead," she

declared, and Sir George laughed again.

"One may hope he is something more than a King, now that he is dead," he answered. "At any rate something more than the fourth George. If the letter gives you pleasure, regard it as your own property henceforth, my love."

Lady Westover accepted the gift with gratification. "Thank you very much, George; it's the sort of thing I like," she confessed. "It means your family

had friends with royalty."

"No," he said. "It merely means that my father knew persons who could win this little gesture of interest in high places for me. No more than that. Lord Minto was always gracious, but needless to say, as a youthful 'Writer,' I did not often challenge his attention."

The trifle was soon forgotten in a greater incident, for, by an evening delivery of letters, they learned that the son of the house was coming home immediately. At this moment the Berlin Congress chanced to be Sir George's first public interest, and he speculated deeply and daily upon its president, Prince Bismarck, and Britain's plenipotentiaries—Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury; but after Wingate's announcement all else was cast out of his mind and he neither spoke nor thought of any other matter.

The young man duly appeared and spent a month with his family. He was hearty and prosperous; but they found him changed, and the effect of environment on character presented interesting problems to

his sisters.

Gertrude approved of Wingate's new outlook on life, while Mary humorously doubted.

"He has lost and he has gained by marriage and

prosperity," she said.

"He has certainly gained weight-both physical

and mental," declared the elder.

"Yes—hot climates either make you too fat, or too thin. Wingate will have to use his dumb-bells oftener. But I didn't mean that. He's grown up, Gertrude; and we all lose a magic something after we have grown up."

"It was time he did. He has developed a keen sense of responsibility, and that's a blessing I never

expected."

"But don't you see how his hostages to fortune have made him selfish? He hasn't got Papa's breadth of mind. He's only interested in his wife and his family and his future—nothing else in the world. Perhaps it's a phase. Presently he'll take larger views again."

"It is better to have steadfast views than large

ones," replied her sister.

"For your success in life perhaps, but not for yourself. Your success in the world and your real success are often quite different things. Success makes some people nicer and some a great deal nastier; but to a few people, it just goes over them and leaves them exactly where they were."
"I doubt it," said Gertrude.

"I'm sure of it." continued her sister. "Going to Africa, instead of making Wingate larger-minded, has made him smaller-minded. It's not Africa, of course: it's his wife. Marriage was bound to be a tremendous factor for Wingate. But he does seem to know everything there is to know about oranges."

"And is not that what he ought to know, seeing his

livelihood depends on oranges?"

"Yes. his livelihood; but don't you begin to feel sometimes that there are one or two other things in the world beside Wingate's oranges and Wingate's son?"

"For him these rightly come first; and Papa quite approves of his views on native labour and so on."

Mary did not argue. She was happy enough in the companionship of Wingate and the change only amused her at heart. He spent a month at home and, from immense satisfaction at his visit and interest in his information, Sir George gradually grew a little listless under the flow of his son's discourse. Wingate was a tremendous talker and had lost any sense of proportion that he might have possessed. Always an egotist, prosperity and a solid position had not modified his attitude to life. He spoke much of his spouse also and extolled her beauty and her wit.

Lady Westover-superb listener that she wasnever wearied in her attention to Wingate. To her he presented an admirable type, and meeting him for the first time, she held no previous knowledge upon which to found judgment of any changes. She considered that his portrait had hardly been fairly painted, for expecting a young man of great charm and irresponsibility—a lover of jest and action, a humorist and a flirt—she found something quite different and was agreeably surprised at Wingate's settled opinions and solid, if selfish, sense. Gertrude, too, felt gratified, while Cherry was somewhat awed by the change. Again she decided that marriage was a most ennobling experience and had evidently exalted her brother as well as herself. Wingate was grown methodical and somewhat didactic. He cared for his clothes, dressed well, had modified his taste for vivid colour, and went to church on Sunday with his father and step-mother. Above all he had ceased to be interested in the sex. This struck Cherry as the most amazing sign of his translation. She felt that Mrs. Wingate Westover must be an astounding woman to exercise such an influence from such a distance. He had become deeply concerned with material prosperity, and he and Lady Westover enjoyed lengthy conversations on the subject of money. She approved more and more highly of Wingate.

"A very clever and understanding young man," she said. "He'll be one of the big ones at the Cape some

day."

As for Johnny, her joyful welcome speedily gave place to indifference. She found that her hero had shrunk into a nonentity, and the spice of original sin, on which she had secretly doted, was almost too painfully absent. Asked in confidence by Cherry what she thought of the new Wingate, she answered with chilling brevity.

"They've fattened him and they've tamed him," said Johnny. "It won't break nobody's heart when he

goes back to 'em."

Strange to say a similar sentiment, couched more delicately, was whispered in another ear by Sir George himself. Mary had dined with them, and finding after the meal that her father had not joined the ladies when Wingate did so, she left her brother discussing the proletariat to its disadvantage with Lady Westover and Gertrude, and went to join her father in his study. He had lighted the gas and brought out his Bibles—a most unusual action after the evening meal.

She came and sat by him and he was glad to see her. "Don't work to-night," she said. "Talk to me. I know exactly just how you're feeling, because I'm feeling the same myself."

"By God's blessing," he answered, "you and I, my Oueenie, are built much on the same pattern, and we have a quality to ride over the rough waves of life instead of sinking beneath them. This levity has its drawbacks, yet I would not willingly change with the more heavily ballasted human craft. Our Wingatehow remarkable!"

"Most remarkable, Papa. Whoever would have thought that growing oranges could have had such an

effect on his character?"

"We ought to rejoice, Queenie. There is no doubt whatever that we ought to rejoice; and instead, such is the frailty of our dispositions, that we feel the loss rather outweigh the gain. A quality of our faulty common nature, that the losses always make us shout with dismay, while the gains seldom win that response of enthusiasm they deserve."

"It's human to cry our losses aloud and keep our gains to ourselves, Papa," she answered. "But you mustn't let Wingate's altered perspective and devotion to oranges and his baby cast you down. I'm sure nobody ever loved their children better than yourself."

"As to oranges," he answered, "upon my soul I

sometimes feel as though I never wished to eat, or see, another; but upon the subject of his son I am always contented to hear him—more so than he is content to listen to me. Wingate, out of his sublime inexperience, appears to imagine that his wife and himself are as competent to conduct the affairs of the heir of our race as I am—a failure of common sense to say no more. Even Johnny, on the prosperity of the babe, fails to interest him, and one can only regret his pride

and pray that it may not have a fall.

"As a fruit-grower doubtless he excels; but it would appear that this calling has a very grave objection, for, too clearly, it narrows the mind, banishes a sense of humour, and so distorts proportion. Though nebulous, Wingate's opinions were not hide-bound in the past. Indeed he allowed himself a latitude that pointed to danger. But now the case is altered and I find him circumscribed by a most restricted horizon. He appears to think that the Cape of Good Hope—a minor dependency when all is said—has become the very centre and nidus of England's prosperity! To be insular I can pardon, if England happens to be the island responsible for such a vision; but to be colonial, my Queenie, is grotesque."

They laughed together over Wingate's downfall.

"It will come right," she said. "It's a phase. You can't help respecting and admiring a place if it's going to make your fortune. People in Calcutta did the same. I expect Wingate will go into their Parliament some day and be a great man after all. Let me put away the Bibles, Papa; and come in and ask Gertrude to play and Fanny to sing."

"They shall," declared Sir George. "They shall play and sing. It will bore Wingate, since it seems that his spouse is the only woman who can either play or sing nowadays; but he must endure our music. The

sound of a man's own voice is not always so good for

him as he imagines."

Nevertheless Wingate's visit proved all too short despite these humorous strictures. The young man preserved his high moral tone to the last and congratulated his father on being now solvent and free from

monetary anxiety.

"There is nothing like peace of mind in these matters," he said. "If you know your financial position is sound and your investments all entirely satisfactory, then one's mental energy is not frittered away on that subject and you have your intellect clear to devote to your advancement and your calling. As a man who is now helping to develop the resources of South Africa, I speak."

"Pearls of wisdom-pearls of wisdom, my dear

boy," murmured Sir George.

"I may add that I have insured my life for a considerable sum on my father-in-law's advice," continued Wingate. "He has shown me that life insurance, for young and good lives, is a most desirable form of investment. Queenie might do worse than insure all

her boys."

"It would be distressing money to claim if a precious child were called, however," declared Sir George; "but you are too young to be sentimental, my son. Strange, Wingate, for you lacked not a vein of sentiment when you left England. Can it be that worldly prosperity hardens the heart, or is there something about the culture of the citron that provokes to insensibility?"

"You may poke fun at me, Governor, but life is life," answered Wingate, and his father admitted it.

"Life is life, as you wisely tell us, Wingate," he answered. "I should know that after three and eighty

years of it. But there is nothing like a home truth sometimes."

"And it takes all sorts to make a world," added Lady Westover.

So Wingate returned to his life's interests, having first bought each member of his family a little gift. But his more considerable purchases returned with him to South Africa.

"It is a temporary eclipse," declared Sir George, when they discussed him with affection on the night after his departure. "I am the last to attach undue importance to my son's present attitude of mind. One has ceased to feel the least anxiety for Wingate. His future would appear to be assured, and with time and experience, his naturally fine qualities will assert themselves and his heart will mellow. Eminent men are usually selfish and, not seldom, a little vain. I have encountered many such. When next he comes home, he has promised to bring his son to be educated in England, and then we shall doubtless mark a larger synthesis in Wingate and a wider cosmic sympathy. The fine material is there."

"I thought him splendid in every way," declared Gertrude. "I never understood him so well, or felt so happy about him, Papa."

"A man of affairs," said Lady Westover. "He is going to be what they call 'a man of affairs,' George."

"I think he is," replied her husband. "And as soon as Wingate is concerned with the affairs of all humanity, and not only his own, I shall rejoice to mark his advancement. I am proud of him, Fanny, and the first to admit he has qualities I myself lacked. It is good to see these appearing."

"It's horrid to find the old Wingate disappearing all the same," thought Mary. "Perhaps he is only

CHAPTER XXVII

EARLY in the following year, the indisposition of her valued friend, Millicent Pomfret, at Cheltenham, caused Lady Westover great concern and she wished to hasten off as swiftly as might be. It was the first time that Sir George had been separated from Fanny since their marriage, and Gertrude quickly perceived that he felt her absence severely. For the first day or two he made nothing of it and busied himself as usual; but he spent a great part of his time in writing to Lady Westover. He was restless, abstracted and cast down.

To her step-mother Gertrude secretly confided these facts, and Fanny presently wrote to say that Mrs. Pomfret was pronounced out of danger and her task nearly at an end. Sir George cheered visibly when the date for her return was fixed, and he made preparations for that event with a measure of his old zest.

"With my Fanny withdrawn," he said, "I have permitted myself a little extravagance, though wholly on her account. She will assuredly come back much run down, Gertrude, for nothing puts such a strain on the middle-aged constitution as going without sleep. Her heroic efforts on behalf of her friend must inevitably have told upon her. Therefore I design stimulant and have ordered a couple of dozen of very fine port from the wood. She will lament it; but must submit if you join me in making her drink it."

Insensibly his life was undergoing modification, and his daughters could not but observe that another spring failed to react as surely and swiftly as of old. He responded, indeed, and was not himself aware of any changes, but his old fires abated; he seemed to shrink a little more into himself and showed a growing disinclination to visit, or to entertain. He much loved, however, to be out of doors, and declared that he slept ill and suffered from melancholy dreams upon such days as exercise was denied him.

Johnny observed the cloud and spoke to Gertrude

on the morning before Lady Westover's return.

"It's one of the days when I feel I'm getting old myself," she said. "They come and go, and they come oftener than what they did. Sir George says I'm not more than seventy-five; but I reckon I'm a good ten years more. It's buried in history when I was born, but it wouldn't surprise me, in another world when the Books are opened, to find I was so old as Sir George himself, or near it."

"Nonsense, Johnny; you can't be. Papa says, since you took a little stimulant with your supper, you have

been as wonderful as ever."

The old woman shook her head.

"There's a time coming when whisky will be powerless. However, my usefulness is very near gone and I only ask to see master out, and then it will be a case of 'well done, thou good and faithful servant.' I've got a growth coming that'll kill me off in a few years, I expect; but so long as it's kept under and not allowed to hurt, it can do its worst."

"If you're ill, you must see the doctor."

"No, no—it ain't nothing to fuss over as yet. I keep my eye on it. No use meeting trouble half-way, only it's borne in on me I'm only human like the rest. And so's Sir George. Time will tell. He cuts the morning prayers short, and that's a sign he's sinking for his breakfast. He ought to have a cup of tea before he leaves his bed, and I've told him so for years,

and when the missis comes home, I hope she'll make him."

Sir George was full of a plan when Lady Westover returned. He declared her looking both thin and worn.

"I mark an unwholesome pallor, Fanny, nor is it a surprise that you should be so much reduced. I anticipated it and prepared for it. Port, both at luncheon and dinner, is indicated, and the wine awaits you."

His wife made no demur and pleasured him in the matter. She had not been at home a week before he

broke his announcement.

"I feel," he said, "that we have exhausted the possibilities of Wick Abbot. I have not come to this conclusion hurriedly, but I am inclined to believe that what we all need is a more bracing and tonic place of residence. In a word Wick Abbot has answered its purpose, and the modest demands of this market town have, so far as I can see, re-established our financial footing and enabled us to contemplate a life more consonant with—not only our position, but our duty. To use a colloquial phrase, Fanny, I am inclined to think we must 'blossom out.'"

"Why, George?" asked Lady Westover.

"For various reasons. Those who are able to employ their fellow-creatures should employ them. I read of unemployment, which means that there are men and women ready and willing to justify existence, but denied the power to do so by some faulty legislation, or lack of national prevision. Obviously, then, it becomes a duty for those who are in a position to give their neighbours work, to do so. Here, under such circumscribed conditions, we can find no work for idle hands to do; and what is the result? Too often the Powers of Evil, which alas! find work for everybody, take our place; then those, who might honourably labour on our behalf, are tempted to activities alike

abhorrent to God and man. It becomes therefore a matter of conscience in my opinion to order our own lives in such a manner that they may produce adequately paid labour for others."

"Dear me, George," said Lady Westover.

"A move is therefore indicated into a somewhat larger sphere, so that our ambit may embrace elements of hope and happiness for those who lack both; and since a move is a move, and the actual distance a minor consideration, I desire to begin a larger life elsewhere. For it is permitted to consider our own convenience at this juncture. A bracing climate will tend to banish this lassitude that I occasionally feel and thus enhance my own usefulness in the scheme of things. It will do you good, Fanny, and it will do Gertrude good; while as for Queenie, she can, of course, accompany us and find a new home for herself and my grandsons as close to our own as may be. We lose our Cherry, but that must be, since she is married and Arthur's interests lie here. What think you, my loves?"

Lady Westover never directly opposed her husband and seldom found occasion to do so. But she had no intention to leave Wick Abbot, or their present home.

"You're wonderful, George. Nothing frightens you," she said. "We must turn it over—all of us."

"Yes, indeed," he answered. "I allow for the element of surprise, and while the scheme is mature in my own mind, it comes, of course, to you and Gerty as a new thing."

"Took our breath away you might say, didn't it,

Gertrude?"

"To think of you 'blossoming out,' dear Papa!"

smiled Gertrude.

"And why not? Is not Spring again in the air? What does Milton say? "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new." Not that our Devon woods and

pastures ever fail of charm for me, and Nature works very lovingly upon the red earth; but change—change, my Gertrude, has ever been a source of inspiration and health to me. Not a city—not a city. I am too old for a city; but some quiet resort, where one may lift up one's eyes to the hills. I had, as a matter of fact, thought of Malvern."

"Wonderful, George! And now I'm going to sing,

if Gertrude will play for me."

Lady Westover rose and presently plunged into one of her nasal ditties, while the old man, relieved to have told his tale, went gently to sleep.

They woke him for prayers, and when he was gone to bed, Lady Westover spoke to her step-daughter.

"Don't worry, Gertrude," she said. "It won't happen. We don't leave St. Paul's Terrace while your dear father's alive. You don't wish it?"

"Indeed, no, Fanny. It's the last thing in the world

that I should wish."

"This is a very good climate for him now. He doesn't want bracing. He wants soothing and distracting. Ask the admiral to come to lunch presently and arrange a long drive for Wednesday, if it's fine. We'll take a meal out somewhere—to that ruin he likes. We must set to work gently to choke your father off this, but in a way not to give him a twinge."

"Yes, indeed, Fanny," answered Gertrude.

She obeyed and sent an urgent invitation to luncheon, which Admiral Ryecroft accepted, but named a much later date. Anticipation and preparation for the entertainment, however, occupied Sir George during a week, and then they arranged a lengthy drive and a picnic, which gave him immense pleasure. To the double ruin of Berry Pomeroy Castle they went, where a Tudor mansion rises encircled by Norman walls and keep. The day was fine

and the old man found much to interest and entertain him here.

At last came the admiral, still hale enough in mind, but suffering much from rheumatism and impatient with the trend of politics.

"The results of the Congress, so far as we're concerned, are most disappointing," he said. "I'd hoped

better things from Dizzy."

"A more settled Europe would indirectly serve us, my dear fellow," declared Sir George, "but I'm afraid—I'm much afraid. Consider Austria—a most rapacious kingdom—entrusted to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina in the interests of European peace!"

"Madness, of course. And the Greek frontiers to be rectified, and Russia to dominate the Black Sea. She promises to make Batoum free—a likely story!

What does Russia know of freedom?"

"The Straits are safe, however."

"Yes, my friend. The Straits are safe just so long as England continues to rule the waves—and no longer."

"The Porte has faithfully promised to treat the Armenians with benevolence and to respect the princi-

ples of religion, liberty and equality."

"We know the Porte's promises. When I see the Turk benevolent to Armenians, I'll believe the leopard can change his spots. Water will be benevolent to fire before the Ottoman respects a Christian in his power to destroy. The way we pander to the Turk will bring its own, well-deserved punishment, Westover."

Sir George sighed.

"I share your disquiet on the general question. To treaties we give a resounding measure of applause, and upon them we bestow a sort of simple trust, that can only be called pathetic to a patient historian like myself. The past shows that they are little worth, for the human story is littered with broken treaties, and religion, which should teach man to respect his bond, is often the inciting cause that actually drives him to break it. A mystery which God alone can solve. What of Cyprus? You have been there, Ryecroft?"

"I have—a God-forsaken island, only good for bad grapes and locust beans. No harbours worth calling such, and little to make it of any strategic value.

Supremely valueless to England."

"Sir Garnet will bring law and order as Governor

and Commander of the Forces."

"What can he do?" asked the admiral. "Wolse-ley's not a conjuror. Cyprus is one of Beaconsfield's theatrical fooleries—nothing behind—only another care."

"We must fall back, then, upon its poetic and classic significance," said Sir George. "What said Leonidas of Tarentum, in the Anthology, if my memory does not fail me?

'She treads the tingling sands of ancient earth And feels the passion of the sunshine meet The passion of her eyes.'

And so on. There maiden Venus rose foam-born from

the blue waves and trod the Cyprian earth."

"Did she? Well, an uglier lot than the Cypriot women I never saw. I remember the fact, though it's

fifty years since I called there in a brig."

Admiral Ryecroft refused to go home until he had exacted a promise of a return visit. At a later date, his friends enjoyed his hospitality, met Miss Protheroe, therefore, once more and gazed again upon Dawmouth.

Miss Protheroe bewailed the fact that the amenities of the watering-place were fast disappearing.

"It has ceased to become a spot where ancient gentlefolk may enjoy either their dignity or repose," she said. "We are overwhelmed during the summer months by people called 'cheap trippers,' Sir George. The railway shamefully caters for these hordes. I never saw such people. I didn't know they existed."

"Dawmouth will last our time, however," prophesied the old sailor. "We linger here like bluebottles in autumn, waiting for the frost to pinch us off; and when we are under the daisies, it don't much matter who

come to Dawmouth."

They rallied him and Sir George opined that the greatest good to the greatest number was still a golden rule.

"If the sea is free to all, while England rules it, then shall we deny like freedom to our own silvery strands?" he asked.

These distractions served to pass the time and perceiving, by their silence on the subject, that his household had not shared his enthusiasm for a change of scene, Sir George, after a tentative question or two, abandoned the subject. They thought he had forgotten it amid the little amusements they planned for him; but he had not forgotten. He often dwelt in thought upon the advantage of a change; but suspected that neither Fanny nor Gertrude was of his mind, and let the subject drop. His old, assertive instincts were beginning to slip away. He accepted decisions as they came and gradually ceased to impose his will upon others.

Only Johnny supported him. She had shared his ambition, for his will was her law, and from the time that he broke to her his intention of a change, before Lady Westover returned home, she declared it a wise and desirable one.

"It's always a light in the darkness to get among a

lot of new tradesmen," said Johnny.

She languished upon perceiving that the dream was ended and began to take an exceedingly gloomy view of her health. Sir George, however, refused to be impressed. He held that Time still toiled after Johnny in vain.

"When my dear doctor son comes to see me in the autumn," he said, "James shall examine Johnny's arterial system as well as my own. All turns upon that, and I believe that we shall learn that her arteries

continue to be in excellent order."

This duly happened, for during the autumn of the year, his elder son spent a couple of days at St. Paul's Terrace. He found not much the matter with the ancient retainer, but his father's health caused him uneasiness. James Westover divulged the fact to Gertrude and she told Lady Westover; but Sir George heard no disquieting note. Indeed James could only report a general and inevitable weakening. There was nothing abnormal in the old man's state, and nothing immediately alarming; but changes had begun to make themselves apparent.

"It is only to say that time does not stand still," explained the doctor to Lady Westover. "He is still wonderful for his age, and his mind is clearer than most of ours; but he is getting very tired. My dear father will be like the funny poem of the American physician that I read not long ago. 'The one-horse chaise,' or is it 'shay'? It goes on and on, and is so perfectly put together that no one part succumbs before another. But when it goes, everything tumbles down at once, and there is no more chaise. So it will be with my father. To-day he will be here; to-morrow he will not be here. So I think it will happen; but the

to-morrow may be still a long way off."

Lady Westover did not contradict him, though at

heart she judged his diagnosis a little sanguine.

"James only sees your father at rare intervals," she said to Mary, "and he is a very clever, observant man, and I should have thought would have marked what we have—the fits of vagueness, when Sir George goes into a dream while he is awake, and only comes out of it when we shout at him. James says that his mind is as clear as ever; but there he's wrong, and we who live with him know better. Your father's judgment is not what it was, even when I first knew him. His ruling passion was always generosity, and the fixed opinion that nobody was quite so well off as himself."

"He always wants his cup of blessings to flow over

for others less blessed."

"I know. I've heard that so often that I'm rather sick of it, Queenie. But don't you tell him for the world. It's beautiful, but it's not business. Your dear father, for example, seems to think every tradesman in Wick Abbot has a monopoly, whereas, thank Heaven, I never saw a place with so much competition. The market is the greatest blessing in that respect. There's nothing like a market for putting the fear of God into shop people. Johnny pointed that out, with her usual penetration in these matters. It is, of course, competition alone that saves the situation for the wretched consumer."

Mary laughed.

"Papa always believes that every shop person has an ailing wife and dozens of sick children hidden away somewhere," she said.

"Nonsense," answered Lady Westover. "He must think of his own wife and children. Our cup is not

brimming over in the least—quite the contrary."

It was true that at this season Sir George began to

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It was true that at this season Sir George began to

reduce not only his physical activities, but his intellectual interests. His life grew narrower and he yielded all that was possible into the hands of others. process was not unconscious but deliberate, for nature told him that his mental energies were waning. applied a simile to himself.

"I am a sinking fire," he said, "and I cannot cook

so many pots of rice together as once I could."
"You warm us, Papa," answered Mary, "and that's all you need trouble about."

"The grey ash accumulates, my Queenie, and the

outside is cold already," he answered.

But the phenomena of autumn gladdened him. The leaf hung late and the spectacle of autumnal woods, seen in mellow October sunshine, continued to give him great pleasure. He drove out still, and often surprised his family with days and even weeks of im-

mense activity.

"The difference," he said, "between spring and autumn is the difference between dawn and sunset. I, who have seen so many of both, am convinced of it. The morning of life is full of hard and glorious promise, earnest, unsmiling, even a little grim at times; while its evening comes mellow and not without laughter for the veteran mind, that can see its own little

leaves shrink and fall, their part played out."

Autumn, however, held sorrows for Sir George, in which all men of good will shared. The stoppage of the City of Glasgow Bank first terrified him, and then wakened a flow of pity and compassion that even Lady Westover was powerless to stem. The disaster caused him profound unhappiness and its magnitude bewildered him and caused him to sleep ill. Then another incident awakened a wave of anger. He was furious with the Government for charging the expenses of an Afghan war on the revenues of India.

"Are we an Empire, or are we not?" he asked them. "To do this mean, pettifogging thing is to tempt every Anglo-Indian mind to disloyalty. Where is their vision—these sordid wretches, who govern us? As for the Afghan, one may say of him, as the native folk say of their landlords, that though he stand in the Ganges and swear by the Ammonite, he will betray you. The Raj can neither forgive nor forget this dreadful error."

When Christmas came, the contrast between the

time and the times still further cast him down.

"Where is peace on earth, where is good-will towards men?" he asked his family. His grandchildren comforted him a little, and there came a photograph of Wingate's son, in contemplation of which he spent many hours.

"A few years hence I shall go to Dartmouth, that I may welcome the boy to his native land," he said.

"Mine must be the first hand he holds."

CHAPTER XXVIII

On a morning in March of the following year, Lady Westover descended to breakfast alone—an action contrary to custom, for as a rule husband and wife appeared together and Sir George waited in his own apartment until Fanny came to him.

"Your father is not well," said her step-mother to Gertrude. "I have persuaded him to take his breakfast in bed and stop there till the doctor sees him. He's

promised and wishes you to read prayers."

That her father should consent to any course so drastic alarmed Gertrude. He detested above all else the need to break his fast in bed.

Gertrude celebrated a scant devotion and, five minutes afterwards, took breakfast to Sir George. Johnny was with him and he made light of his indis-

position and presently ate his usual, spare meal.

A doctor called at eleven o'clock and spent half-anhour with the patient, while Lady Westover and Sir George's three daughters awaited news. For Gertrude had summoned both Mary and Cherry, but kept the fact from their father lest he should be alarmed.

Dr. Morrison—a young man—found no immediate cause for anxiety, but declared his patient to be weak

and his pulse fretful.

"At his age," said Morrison, "one cannot prophesy with any certainty. He may get quite well again, or he may grow worse. He is anxious to see his son, who I understand is a medical man, and I should send for him to-day."

He left directions for diet and said that he would

despatch some medicine immediately and call again in the evening. The younger sisters went to their homes upon this news, while Gertrude sat with her father. He was annoyed that the doctor had wished him to stop in bed.

"It is nothing," he assured his daughter. "Merely an indifferent night—a touch of cold to the liver I suspect. My own inclination is to rise and walk a mile; but it is idle to employ a physician unless you trust him, and I must obey. He will doubtless allow me down to dinner. I expressed a wish to see James, who knows my constitution, and he supports the idea."

"We have telegraphed to him, Papa."

"I hope the journey will put him to no inconvenience," said Sir George.

When the medicine came he tasted it.

"A tonic," he told them, "and since I react so swiftly to drugs, doubtless the result will soon be manifest."

After his mid-day meal, he slept for two hours, then directed Gertrude to read to him.

"My sublime Fuller," he said. "He was a saint, and his writings abound in saintship, combined with that blessed element of humour which links him with lesser humanity and makes us love him while we laugh."

The work was exceedingly familiar to Gertrude She had read "The Holy State" aloud to Sir George for years: it was the old divine's work in which her father specially delighted and held the finest exposition

of the doctor's genius.

"Read 'The Good Judge,'" directed Sir George, "and then 'Contentment.' That will be enough, if I do not weary you, my Gerty. It is well sometimes, under the mellow light of Fuller, to see how far in my life's pilgrimage I failed of the high and noble ideals that he sets."

"You did not fail, Papa," she answered. "When I read 'The Good Judge,' I see you, yourself."
But he shook his head and Gertrude, opening the old

book, read to him.

"'He is patient and attentive in hearing the pleading on both sides; and harkens to the witnesses, though tedious. He may give a wakening testimony who hath but a dreaming utterance, and many country people must be impertinent before they can be pertinent, and cannot give evidence about a hen, but first they must begin with the egg. All of which our judge is contented to harken to .

"'Having heard with patience, he gives sentence with uprightness. For when he puts on his robes, he puts off his relation to any, and, like Melchisedec, be-

comes without pedigree . .

"'He silences the lawyer who seeks to set the neck of a bad cause, once broken with a definite sentence . . .

"'He so hates bribes that he is jealous to receive any kindness above the ordinary proportion of friendship; lest, like the sermons of wandering preachers, they should end in begging; and surely integrity is the proper portion of a judge. Men have a touchstone whereby to try gold, but gold is the touchstone whereby to try men .

"When he sits upon life, in judgment he remembereth mercy. When they say, a butcher may not be of the jury, much less let him be the judge. Oh let him take heed how he strikes that hath a dead

hand . . .

"The sentence of condemnation he pronounceth with all gravity. It is best when steeped in the judge's tears. He avoideth all jesting on men in misery: easily may he put them out of countenance whom he hath power to put out of life . . .

"'And thus we leave our judge to receive a just

reward of his integrity from the Judge of judges, at the Great Assize of the world."

Her father was asleep and she gazed upon him breathing placidly. He wore a white silken nightcap and the sheets of his simple bed were drawn up to his chin. She pulled down the blind gently, put a little coal on the fire piece by piece with her fingers and, calling Johnny, left him.

The doctor was puzzled when he came again.

"One can point to no dangerous symptom save the heart's weakness," he said; "but I doubt if he will re-

cover. You must not expect it, I fear."

His verdict amazed Gertrude and Lady Westover, for they believed that, as on former occasions when he was unduly weary, a day or two in bed would restore Sir George.

On the morning of the next day he spoke to them

and himself told them he would not get better.

"I am in no haste to anticipate the end," he said, "neither do I fear it in any sort, my loves. But it is coming—suddenly I think, like a thief in the night. I feel no pain at all—save the negative pain of profound and childish weakness."

He asked continually for James as the day proceeded and was glad when his son came to his bedside. The doctor spent an hour alone beside his father, then left Sir George with Johnny and spoke to the rest.

"He is dying," said James.

And meantime Sir George spoke with Johnny, extolled her lifetime of service and desired her not to

leave Lady Westover when he was gone.

"That we shall meet again I have no doubt whatever," he said, "and though the relations of employer to employed in another world than this are in the knowledge of God Almighty alone, I conceive that our friendship will be renewed, Johnny, for I picture Heaven as only another earth, purged from sorrow and sin, with all that makes beautiful our human nature purified until we are the admirable creatures our Maker intended us to be."

"You ain't gone yet, Sir George," declared Johnny, "and Mr. James may pull you round. He knows your

inner works. Sir."

Towards evening he grew weaker and his mind wandered. His son stayed beside him and Cherry and Mary remained in the house. He talked a good deal, but addressed himself to others than those beside him. He accosted Wingate repeatedly and begged him to send his child home. The women came and went. Then, after midnight, he slept very peacefully for an hour. When he awoke, the controls of nature had failed

He drank a little soup laced with brandy and kept it down. For a time he knew them and spoke to each of them. He asked Mary after her boys and begged to see them in the morning.

"Wilford will be a soldier," he said. "I know not how to plan his career for Charles. Time will show—

perhaps the Church."

His son sat close to him and held his hand, while

Lady Westover was at the other side of his bed.

At two in the morning, suddenly, Sir George grew very animated and his eyes shone. He sought to sit up and his wife helped him to do so. He stared, where Johnny sat in a chair at the foot of his bed, but saw her not.

There came great astonishment and welcome into his face and he spoke with a full voice. By name and in their order he greated vanished people.

"Laura! Claire!" he said. He looked at his visions

and smiled and nodded.

"Miranda—little Miranda! My flower!" he murmured; but the name had never been heard on his lips

by any present save two.

"My mother," said James. He alone was weeping. The brown man bent his grey head, then turned and stared where his father stared. But none saw the shadows.

"Gertrude! Gertrude—dear wife!"

"My God!" whispered Johnny to herself. "All his women have come for him."

The light faded from his face and Fanny, whose arm was round him, let him sink back. She took off his nightcap and kissed him.

"How the stars shine!" he said.

Then he shut his eyes and their unconquerable blue closed upon the world. They knelt beside him and a little grudged the hand that James held between his own.

"Come closer to him, Johnny," directed Gertrude.

In five minutes more he had passed, and Lady Westover was the first to know it. She kissed him again and rose to her feet.

"Your dear, dear father has gone," she said, then

she left them beside him and stole away.

For a brief while they forgot her, but soon Gertrude remembered and went to her.







